COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: INSTRUCTOR AND STUDENT CONCEPTS OF CIVILITY AND CONFLICT IN ONLINE COURSES

by

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ABSTRACT

Online learning continues to become more prevalent in higher education. Despite extensive research of interpersonal constructs in face-to-face (F2F) instructional environments (e.g., immediacy, expectations, clarity), research has yet to explore factors such as student incivilities, instructor misbehaviors, and conflict in online courses as separate and unique from the F2F context. Based on student and instructor responses to open-ended online survey questions, this study explicated the various student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors that occur in online courses and considered what incivility/misbehavior categories tend to precipitate conflict in online courses. The findings suggest that there is a difference between F2F and online learning environments, which warrants sustained research that considers the F2F and online instructional settings independently.

To Mom and Dad,
My first and forever teachers

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– Eddie Harris, Jr.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Online education is part of a broader learning tradition known as distance education, defined as “any formal approach to learning in which a majority of instruction occurs while educator and learner are at a distance from another” (Verduin & Clark, 1991, p. 8). Long before the days of promoting online learning on the World Wide Web, Pennsylvania State University was one of the first universities to announce that they had their own ‘information highway,’ by offering correspondence studies in 1892 (Banas & Emory, 1998). Initially, distance learning was developed out of a need to reduce geographic distance between students and the physical institution. In addition to this, distance education allows students who are separated by time to partake in a course. Beyond decreasing the gap of time and space, proponents of distance education cite the many advantages of it including access, learning, and expense (Daly, 1999).

Numerous modes of delivery exist within distance education. At the outset, print-based correspondence courses were offered. As technologies emerged, radio and television-based courses surfaced as well. Scholars researched the instructional uses of television and radio oftentimes juxtaposing them against traditional, face-to-face (F2F) courses. Notable comparable studies by Schramm

(1962) examined learning that occurred in differing instructional formats such as instructional television and compared them to a classroom in which F2F instruction occurred. His analysis indicated no significant differences between the two methods of teaching. In the 1990s, “computer-based CDs and other forms computer-assisted instruction, as well as computer-mediated instruction” (Daly, 1999, p. 482) gained traction as distance education instructional modes.

Research emphasizes that no one instructional mode is more effective over another. Banas and Emory (1998) asserted that distance learning and teaching are different from the traditional F2F learning environment for both instructors and students because “the social context and interaction of all participants are inherently different” (p. 372). The advances in distance education have had implications for interpersonal interactions between instructor and student. Most significant is how communication transitioned from technologies that were purely asynchronous and were burdened by time delays, to learning environments that make synchronous and immediate communication more feasible.

Contemporary distance education research has largely focused on one format in particular, online instruction. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) reported that approximately 4.3 million undergraduate students had taken at least one distance education course. Allen and Seaman (2014) have tracked the trends of online education in US higher education institutions for the past 10 years. They identified three types of technology-based courses, which include web facilitated courses, blended or “hybrid” courses, and online courses (see

Appendix A for a detailed description of course types). In terms of online education specifically, nearly 1.6 million higher education students were enrolled in at least one online course in 2002, where at least 80 – 100% of material is delivered via a learning management system (LMS) typically without F2F meetings. As of 2012, the number of students taking at least one online course had grown to 7.1 million, indicating, "students taking at least one online course is at an all-time high of 33.5 percent" (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 4). This statistic represents a jump of almost 24% since 2002.

Beyond students making decisions to enroll in online courses, administrators clearly understand that developing their online offerings is of great importance. Almost 60% of higher education institutions view online courses as critical to their long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Moreover, over 80% of institutions see both online courses and full programs as a vital part of their university's strategic plan (Allen & Seaman, 2014), indicating that online education is more than only a passing phase in instructional formats. These online education statistics reveal several realities that may be increasingly likely regarding the learning environment, as we know it. First, students may be able to achieve a degree completely online, without ever setting foot into a brick and mortar, traditional F2F campus and/or classroom. Second, teachers will be able to conduct and complete all of their curricular work, including communication with students, in a virtual setting.

Scholarly research regarding online instruction has primarily focused on several aspects of online courses such as advantages to online learning (Clark &

Jones, 2001; Daly, 1999) and best practices of effective virtual learning environments (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010; Stavredes, 2011). Several other relevant lines of research represent the communicative behaviors that transpire in online learning environments, such as teacher presence and building social communities, each of which are discussed in turn.

Communicative Aspects of Online Learning

In response to a lack of clarity about the definition of "interaction" in distance learning research, Moore (1989) articulated a distinction in three types of interaction that occur in such learning environments: learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. An online instructor's disposition toward these three types of interaction is communicated in various ways, most often through instructor presence and the creation and maintenance of social community.

Instructor Presence

Instructor presence, also referred to as social presence in the literature, is defined in a number of ways. In online learning contexts specifically, Aragon (2003) explained it is "the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" (p. 59). Others have characterized it as "purposive in developing positive instructor/student relationships" (Hazel, Crandall, & Caputo, 2014, p. 314) and include interactions that demonstrate immediacy and intimacy (Gundawardena & Zittle, 1997). Taken together, teaching presence encompasses the positive communicative behaviors that an instructor can prompt and advance in their online courses.

Most important to this discussion is the aspect of teaching presence that focuses on learner-instructor interaction in which the instructor-student relationship may be encouraged through communication. Communication in mediated learning contexts presents unique challenges for both instructors and students such as providing/receiving feedback, social interaction, and student identity (Sherblom, 2010; Vanhorn, Pearson, & Child, 2008). Therefore, scholars have developed strategies for online instructors to promote their social presence in online courses. First, participation in online discussions is vital to maintaining "the interest, motivation, and engagement of students in active learning" (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 7). This includes the instructor assuming an active role in reading and contributing to student submission in the discussions and maintaining social presence through purposeful timing, allowing students to respond to the comments (Aragon, 2003; Hazel et al., 2014).

Next, immediacy can be demonstrated by addressing students by name, using humor, self-disclosing in ways that establish credibility and sharing personal experiences. As an example, instructors can introduce themselves to the class, sharing relevant personal information through a short video welcome message (Aragon, 2003). Finally, providing personal feedback is a strategy in which online instructors can develop their social presence. Kehrwald (2008) suggested that instructors should provide regular feedback in discussions, whereas Aragon (2003) asserted that personalized feedback should be given in regard to "assignments, participation, and their progress in the course" (p. 64). It is important for an instructor to demonstrate these communication behaviors as

they serve as a point of modeling appropriate behaviors for the online learning environment (Anderson et al., 2001). Consequently, communication is crucial in developing and maintaining interaction, which may in turn lead to positive and significant instructor-student relationships.

Communication between students and instructors might positively influence student motivation to learn, an often-cited challenge of online learning environments (Moore, 1989; Vanhorn et al., 2008). Additionally, scholars have declared that the advantages of instructor presence influence student satisfaction as well as learning outcomes (Aragon, 2003; Freitas, Myers, & Avtgis, 1998; Hazel et al., 2014).

Immediacy in F2F classrooms is viewed as a predictor to student behaviors. Furthermore, immediate teacher behaviors (e.g., humor, affect) influence student motivation and learning outcomes (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2002). This helps us to understand why students report a disinclination to comply with instructors who are not immediate (Kearney, Plax, & Burroughs, 1991). Despite the findings regarding the importance and effects of positive instructor-student interactions, little is known about negative or conflictive instructor-student interactions and if and how they may conversely effect motivation to learn or participate in online courses specifically.

Social Community

Another salient area of communication behaviors in online courses is conveying and building a sense of an online learning community. Because online courses are facilitated completely via course management systems and

only require a very small amount of F2F time (if any at all), students often report a feeling of isolation (Banas & Emory, 1998). In fact, Cvetko (2001) noted that, in many ways, technology creates a contradiction; it reduces social involvement, but students often report that they desire to feel connected. As a solution, scholars have proposed the use of learning communities to establish and/or restore a feeling of connectedness in two types of interaction, learner-instructor and learner-learner.

Learning communities are not a new phenomenon; they have been used and studied in F2F courses. More recently learning communities have been widely studied in the online learning context and advocated in order to reduce the feeling of distance in the learning environment. The literature regarding learning communities suggests that they need to be nurtured, interpersonal in nature, and interactive, all which can be fostered through effective teacher communication (Goodnight & Wallace, 2005; Lock, 2002). Establishing a classroom climate that promotes a feeling of community commences when the student logs into the online class and can be encouraged nonverbally (by way of activities, such as icebreakers in an initial class activity) or verbally (through explicit expectations on the syllabus).

Additionally, instructors can use various teaching strategies that signal they value and encourage interaction in the online learning environment among students and between teachers and students. One strategy is to partner/group students together for certain assignments (such as discussions, peer reviews, study groups); these groups can be assigned early in the term and/or change

throughout the semester in order to engage different sets of students (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010). Formally, the students would be required to work together online to accomplish different course tasks; informally, they may maintain closeness with one another and begin to form relationships that are not only task-related. In addition to small groups/pairs, an instructor can set the climate for online courses by having the students post a short autobiography on a Discussion Board, which not only allows a teacher to model discussion posts, but helps to establish commonalities early and before content is presented (as is customarily done in F2F courses during the first session/week of class).

Planning how/if/when these interactions occur takes preparation and coordination on the instructor's part. However, with the knowledge that students can feel isolated in online learning environments, an instructor's encouragement and use of strategies to build learning communities is crucial (Meyers, 2003; Sherblom, 2010). Particularly in the case of placing an emphasis on building and developing a learning community, the goals of online teaching are propelling the choice for the use of technology. In other words, an instructor does not choose technology and haphazardly discover that it promotes collaboration and the feeling of closeness and community. Rather, the strategies for learning are chosen purposefully, with the clear intent to increase connectedness among students and between the instructor and students.

Literature suggests establishing learning communities as a conflict prevention strategy in F2F learning environments (Kearney & Plax, 1992; Meyers, 2003). Peer learning strategies (e.g., partnering students together, small group

work, ice breakers) help students develop connections and feel comfortable with one another. Furthermore, when students have developed community or social cohesion the likelihood of conflict or aggressive behaviors is reduced (Meyers, 2003). Be that as it may, this line of knowledge is not explored in the literature concerning online courses.

In sum, instructor presence and the creation and maintenance of social communities are areas of online teaching/learning research that have been thoroughly investigated. This body of scholarship represents two communicative aspects of online learning, but do little to explore how the deficit of such aspects may precipitate conflict between students and instructors.

Statement of the Problem

Instructional communication research has largely focused on aspects of the "traditional" F2F classroom (see e.g., Myers, 2010). Such research has offered claims about teacher communicative behavior as it relates to cognitive and affective learning (Avtgis, 2001; Chesebro, 2003; Kelley & Gorham, 1988), messages that teachers use to establish and maintain control in the classroom (Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984, 1985), and teacher communication behaviors that are not received positively by students (Boice, 1996; Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991; Plax & Kearney, 1999). Together, these programs of research, and others, support the claim that teaching is essentially a communication accomplishment and specific teacher behaviors can enhance or detract from student learning. The majority of this research examines the F2F learning environment and provides very little support to our

understanding of effective teacher or student communication behaviors in the online setting.

Given the prevalence of online courses and programs, and aspirations for growth of online courses and degree programs, particularly at the University of Utah (Allen & Seaman, 2014; “UOnline Programs and Courses,” 2014), faculty development is necessary. Thus, a continued need exists to investigate the online learning environment and its communicative dimensions. Research suggests that characteristics of effective teaching and learning in online learning environments include social presence (Dow, 2008) and learning communities (Goodnight & Wallace, 2005; Lock, 2002). Communication research in online instructional contexts has received scarce attention and primarily addresses constructs such as immediacy (Aguilar, 2010; Baker, 2001; Witt, Schrodt, & Turman, 2010) and expectations (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010; Lawrence, O’Dell, & Stephan, 2005). Because relatively scarce research has explored the communicative aspects of online instruction, there is a need for understanding the specific communication behaviors that might help, or hurt, teaching and learning in an online learning environment. Because teaching and learning deeply depend on the exchanges of ideas, research on how communication varies in this specific context is crucial.

Although the research is scant, existing research does indicate increases in uncivil behaviors in F2F courses (Burroughs, 1990; Kearney, Plax, & Burroughs, 1991; Meyers, 2003; Nilson, 2010). These behaviors, it appears, might be more likely to occur in an online setting than in a F2F environment

because of the mediated communication channels. Such behaviors may cause harm to the teaching and learning environment; this may in turn have serious implications such as students dropping a course and withdrawing from serious and authentic attempts to communicate. Though research has already ventured to analyze interpersonal constructs such as immediacy and expectations, it has yet to explore the contributing factors to and management of conflict and how it is communicated in online courses. Again, as more and more higher education institutions move towards programs and courses that are entirely facilitated online, it will remain important to continue focusing on the online learning environment and the many effects that the varying modes of communication may have on both students and instructors. Thus, the purpose of this study is to focus on identifying, naming, and describing patterns of student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors and consider if/what incivility/misbehavior categories tend to precipitate conflict in online learning environments.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher- Student as an Interpersonal Relationship

The teacher-student relationship is part of a broad area of study identified as instructional communication. Staton (1989) characterized instructional communication as the study of human communication processes in instructional contexts. Instructional communication is distinctive because it is not only concerned with instruction in communication courses, but how instruction and communication are employed in all disciplines. Additionally, instructional communication tends to focus on communication variables that affect all learning environments including training, mentoring, coaching, and various education levels (including K – 12) – although higher education contexts are more often researched (Buell, 2004; Hyun & Davis, 2005; Jaasma, 2002; Turman, 2003; Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997).

Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984) noted that instructional communication research has generally explored teacher characteristics and student characteristics. However, Friedrich (1987) identified several distinct areas of instructional communication research, which included (a) trait-rating (which addresses what the “best” teachers do), (b) trait-observation (how a teacher carries out instruction in a learning environment), (c) how the classroom is

structured, (d) process-product (which connects instructional strategies to learning outcomes), (e) and the mediating-process (which focuses on student perceptions and processing responses).

Instructional communication scholarship is based on the premise that the teacher-student relationship is interpersonal in nature. Scholarship indicates there is not a definitive conceptualization of interpersonal communication and scholars generally agree several distinguishing features of this type of communication exist. Descriptions usually specify that interpersonal communication is a process with the inclusion of at least two communicators, involvement between the communicators, creation of meaning, and enactment of verbal and nonverbal messages (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008; Knapp & Daly, 2011).

Beyond these key features, interpersonal communication used in instructional communication research is often contextualized by developmental stages and communication skills. These components offer a helpful framework in understanding how the teacher-student relationship is situated as interpersonal.

Developmental Stages

Instructional scholars have pointed out the teacher-student relationship moves through a relational development process (DeVito, 1986; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Mottet & Beebe, 2006). DeVito (1986) explained that relational development “refers to the processes involved in creating an interpersonal relationship” (p. 51) and that teachers and students move through stages, much like other interpersonal relationships. Scholars have established several models

that help explicate the various stages that are experienced in interpersonal relationships (DeVito, 1986; Knapp, 1984; Krug, 1982) and several of the developmental stages are relevant in demonstrating that teacher-student relationships are interpersonal. Similarly, Boettcher and Conrad (2010) suggested that online courses move through four stages and the resulting communication between instructors and students transform during each of the four periods of developing their interpersonal relationship.

Initiating. Relational development models uniformly indicate that initiating is the first stage in which interpersonal relationships commence. In terms of the learning environment, the first day of class provides teachers an opportunity to begin establishing relationships with students. Cooper and Simonds (2007) articulated, “Our prior knowledge of the students and theirs of us, our mutual expectations, and our initial impressions” (p. 25) play a role during the initiation stage. Because the relationship is in its beginning stages, there is usually a marked amount of agreement, cooperation, and conformity.

The initiating stage offers an occasion for teachers to help students through the process of secondary socialization, where students become aware of and begin to understand what skills are necessary in order “to perform the role of student in a particular classroom” (Friedrich & Cooper, 1999). Specifically, students reported that they want teachers to cover the following categories of information on the first day of class: (a) what content will be covered in class and how it relates to other work, (b) course procedures (including the typical layout, work load, types of assignments, etc.), and (c) information about the teacher (i.e.,

personality, accessibility, approachability) (Friedrich & Cooper, 1999). This first stage of relationship development between student and teacher is significant to teaching as first impressions help students understand the expectations set by the teacher and often set the stage for the types of communication and behaviors that occur in the learning environment for the remainder of the class (i.e., term, year, etc.).

Communication in the initial stages of an online course is similar to that found in F2F courses. On the first day, online instructors explicitly communicate with students about the course goals, content for the term, and course policies; this usually comes in the form of a text-based page and/or video welcome recorded by the instructor. Deviating from the initiating stage in F2F courses, instructors begin understanding students individually and should facilitate students becoming acquainted with one another as well by initiating discussion and requiring students to post short bios (e.g., ice breaker discussions). The first day online should encourage students to become familiar not only with the format of the course, but the instructor too. Instructors can accomplish this by promoting their social presence, which builds credibility, approachability, and conveys an instructor's personality.

Experimenting. In this second stage of relational development, communication begins to progress or evolve. Both students and teachers experiment by testing one another in order to appraise the boundaries around the relationship. Interestingly, although this stage represents that the relationship is progressing, teachers and students view each other through the lens of their

given role (Cooper & Simonds, 2007). That is, neither is understood as individuals at this point. The teacher is an authority figure, but not a unique or distinct being and students may still be viewed as a body, not as independent persons in the classroom.

Nonetheless, during the experimenting stage, students tend to test behaviors that help to discover limits and consequences. For example, in the first stage, students seek to find out course procedures; in this stage, students often test the limits of those procedures (e.g., What are the repercussions of late work?) and seek to understand further what it takes to satisfy the teacher (e.g., participation, quality of work). These behaviors are often viewed by teachers as student misbehaviors (see discussion below) and sometimes mark the first sign of discord in the learning environment. On the other hand, teachers are attempting to recognize the teaching techniques and management skills that most positively impact the particular group of learners.

Online, as instructors and students continue to develop their relationship, their communication similarly adapts in the experimenting stage. Boettcher and Conrad (2010) indicate that students and instructors settle into a rhythm and at this point online instructors begin moving from solely directing learners to supporting them in their exploration and engagement of the course content. In this way, both instructors and students are viewed as experimenting with boundaries, although in the online context, it seems to be more content-related rather than relationship-related.

Intensifying. Moving towards a more established interpersonal

relationship occurs in the intensifying stage (Cooper & Simonds, 2007). Teachers and students move beyond their roles in this stage, begin to emerge as individuals, and demonstrate competence in communicating on an interpersonal level. In addition to teacher and student behavior becoming more predictable at this stage, both are also able to explain the behaviors because of the knowledge they have of one another. Lastly, it becomes easier for students to understand and perform the communication rules in a particular classroom because interpersonal communication has likely unfolded with the teacher at this point.

During this phase in online courses, students are a more established part of the learning community and (if promoted and supported effectively) have a deepened understanding of their relationships with their classmates and instructor. Because, as the intensifying stage implies, instructor and student behavior is more predictable, instructors are encouraged to move from displaying a heavy teaching presence to a more "personalized and small group teaching presence" (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010, p. 47). Due to the established relationships at this point, online instructors begin to share power and responsibility for directing learning.

Deterioration and dissolution. The final stage or conclusion of relationships is usually viewed as a negative experience; however, teachers and students experience this occurrence often (e.g., at the end of each term) and so it tends to be a more neutralized event. In fact, DeVito (1986) suggested that, "In the teaching situation, this stage has a positive tone…[and] represents a normal and healthy developmental process" (p. 55) because it allows for moving on to

new mentor opportunities and creating new relationships with other students and teachers. Paradoxically, because teachers are charged with assigning grades at the end of a term, this period is sometimes discernable because students may communicate negatively regarding grade concerns/appeals.

Online teaching literature indicates that the final weeks are viewed in a widely positive light. During this stage in the instructor-student relationship, instructors represent a more of a supporting mentoring role while students experience independence. In the closing weeks of the online course, instructors are encouraged to "ensure that the learners receive feedback on their knowledge" (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010, p. 348) and gather information from students about what they are taking away from the course. This, in turn, aids in understanding how to refine the course in the future.

In comparing the teacher-student relationship to other interpersonal relationships (e.g., friendships), Frymier and Houser (2000) aptly noted that status difference and time constraints are two areas where the relationships deviate. Even so, this does not affect how communication functions to develop the teacher-student relationship. In other words, the four stages of relational development presented are useful in identifying the various points in which the relationship between teachers and students is refashioned through communicative activities.

Beyond the developmental stages that are experienced in the learning environment, instructional scholars recognize that interpersonal skills are necessary in order for teachers to build relationships, share content, and promote

the teaching-learning process. This discussion now turns to the relevant communication skills essential to teaching.

Interpersonal Skills and Variables in the Instructional Setting

Because relationships are established and maintained via interpersonal communication, possessing interpersonal skills is an important aspect of relationship development regardless of the type of relationship (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Scholarship has produced abundant research regarding communication variables that are salient to academic interpersonal relationships (e.g., self-disclosure, immediacy, credibility, humor; see e.g., Fassett & Warren, 2010). This significant body of research has resulted in an understanding of how teachers' interpersonal skills and variables affect cognitive/affective learning, student attitudes, student motivation, student course feedback/evaluations, affect (i.e., liking of the teacher), student perceptions of teaching effectiveness, and willingness to communicate (both in and out of the classroom).

With the understanding that teaching is not only content driven, but relationally driven, communicative capabilities are material to the teaching-learning process and relationship skills have been categorized according to distinct abilities. As an example, DeVito (1986) identified the following relational skills as ones that effective teachers should possess: (a) communicate effectively in interpersonal interactions; (b) initiate and encourage meaningful dialogue; (c) control degrees of openness and self-disclosure; (d) compliment, reinforce, and reward; (e) establish, maintain, and relinquish control; (f) deal with conflict and utilize conflict strategies that are productive to meaningful dialogue; (g) active

listening; (h) interpret different messages (i.e., content, relational) and understand the nuanced verbal and nonverbal cues associated with relational messages; and (i) identify and restore relationships. Furthermore, based on the notion that teaching is a relational activity, Graham, West, and Schaller (1992) noted that a relational teaching approach (RTA) is made up of three interpersonal constructs: communication competence, immediacy, and humor. That is, these communication constructs are often researched as a part of relational skills and are an important part of facilitating effective classroom communication.

In an examination of the teacher-student relationship, Frymier and Houser (2000) utilized the Communication Function Questionnaire (CFQ) to measure the communication skills that students found necessary in teachers.[1] Most importantly, this study provided support for the teacher-student relationship as an interpersonal relationship. Students reported that referential skills (ability to convey information clearly and unambiguously), ego supportive skills (ability to make another feel good about her/himself), and conflict management skills (ability to reach mutually satisfying solutions in conflict) were among the most important skills for teachers to possess and were predictors of student learning and motivation too.

More recently, Martin and Myers (2010) noted that most instructors' relational teaching skills are displayed through their "interpersonal communication traits and more specifically through their presentational

[1] Burleson and Samter (1990) developed the Communication Function Questionnaire (CFQ) instrument, which measures eight communication skills in same-sex relationships. Although generated to test a different type of relationship, the measurement demonstrates significant overlap with the relationship skills that DeVito (1986) conveyed (i.e., conversational, referential, ego supportive, conflict management, comforting, persuasive, narrative, and regulation skills).

communication traits" (pp. 263-264). They identified three presentational traits, which each have roots in interpersonal communication: self-disclosure, communicator style, and socio-communicative style. For teachers, the connections between communication skills and the relational characteristics of teaching presented in the communication and instruction literature illuminate the critical nature of having (or developing) a strong competence in interpersonal communication in order to be effective on both content and relational levels.

F2F instructor immediacy. In terms of classroom communication, research teacher immediacy is perhaps the most studied variable (Witt et al., 2010). Initially adapted from psychology, Mehrabian's (1969) ideas about immediacy were adopted to explore the "perception of physical or psychological closeness" (Richmond, 2002, p. 65), which is comprised of both verbal and nonverbal components. Students perceive teachers who demonstrate immediacy as warm and approachable; conversely, nonimmediate instructors are oftentimes viewed as cold and unfriendly (Cooper & Simonds, 2007).

Specifically, verbal immediacy behaviors include communicating concern for students, addressing students by name, using the words *we* and *our*, appropriate teacher self-disclosure, use of humor, and exchanges with students before/after class (Gorham, 1988; Mehrabian, 1969). On the other hand, nonverbal immediacy behaviors are implicit indications of affect and approachability. These behaviors include instructor eye contact, smiling, gestures (natural and animated), forward leans, and movement around the classroom (Witt et al., 2010). Immediacy behaviors have been studied

extensively in the F2F context and have been found to positively affect cognition, affective learning, student evaluations of an instructor, as well as positively impact student motivation (Allen, Witt, & Wheeless, 2006; Burroughs, 2007; Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Frymeir, 1994; Moore, Masterson, Christophel, & Shea, 1996; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1996).

Online instructor immediacy. In addition to studying immediacy in the F2F classroom, researchers have explored the variable in computer-mediated instructional contexts. In their study of online learning environments, Freitas et al. (1998) noted that students have varying perceptions of instructor verbal and nonverbal immediacy. Findings indicate that, "nonverbal immediacy cues are filtered out by a text-only medium" (Witt et al., 2010, p. 203) and so an increase in verbal immediacy skills may make up for the loss of instructor nonverbal behaviors. Baker (2001) studied the effects of teacher immediacy in effective online courses and found a moderate correlation between immediacy and cognitive learning, and a strong correlation between immediacy and affective learning. In sum, Baker's findings were significant in that they supported the existing understanding that immediacy behaviors help advance and sustain teacher-student interpersonal relationships.

Instructors often use immediacy cues in an online learning environment to signal that the teacher and student co-exist in a learning environment. In a study of the online basic communication course (i.e., public speaking), Aguilar (2010) found that teachers effectively employed verbal immediacy behaviors in online

courses. In particular, teachers used terms such as “our” and “we” in class announcements and emails. The presence of verbal immediacy cues helped to demonstrate inclusivity, an important aspect of community and belonging in an online course.

What studies of online courses appear to neglect is the consideration and observation of nonverbal immediacy cues in online learning contexts. Previous studies appear to assume online courses are solely text-based or include observations of courses in which instructors did not utilize visual or synchronous communication channels. Eye contact, smiling, and gestures are all nonverbal immediacy behaviors that can be exercised by teachers via asynchronous means (e.g., video messages, video-recorded lectures) or synchronous methods such as video chat (e.g., Skype, Big Blue Button). Despite the limited research exploring the nonverbal aspects of teacher immediacy in online courses, the findings do offer further support for the idea that immediacy not only has an affect on the teacher-student relationship, but on the ways that students learn and feel connected in computer-mediated learning environments.

F2F expectations. As previously discussed, Moore (1989) summarized the three ways that students interact in a learning environment: learner-content, learner-learner, and learner-instructor. Teachers are responsible for establishing expectations about all three of these interactions. Therefore, this discussion turns to another relevant variable that affects the teacher-student relationship, establishing expectations. Teachers have expectations of what they envision for their learning environment; these expectations are communicated in two ways:

implicitly and explicitly. A teacher's expectations regarding behaviors are often communicated via modeling. By demonstrating certain manners and ways of communicating, a teacher can lead students to understand what behaviors are appropriate for the class.

Most relevant to the discussion of teacher expectations is Moore's (1989) concept of the learner-instructor relationship and consequent instructor-student interactions. In light of this, Friedrich and Cooper (1999) asserted that a teacher's expectations can signal to students what type of relationship they can expect to form with a teacher, or at the very least, what type of relationship their instructor is open to. Students consider questions such as the following: Will the teacher be open to or closed from communication with students? Does the instructor value connections or relationships with students? Teachers share these types of expectations explicitly on the first day of class through typical interactions such as teacher self-presentation. Here initial impressions offer telling cues about a teacher's communication preferences and behaviors (Friedrich & Cooper, 1999). Moreover, teachers can implicitly communicate their expectations through documents such as the course syllabus. Though not a requirement, some scholars encourage instructors to share their approach and "express [their] commitment to education…[their] view of the mutual rights and obligations between instructors and students…[and] the rapport with students that [they] aim to develop" (Nilson, 2010, p. 36).

Research alludes to establishing clear expectations, but it never connects the tangentially relevant body of instructional studies regarding clarity in the

learning environment. In addition to developing expectancies, a teacher must be capable of effectively relaying the information to students. Research has established that there is a positive correlation between clarity and affect for an instructor (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2002; Titsworth, 2001). This finding is significant to the discussion of establishing expectations because students may react more favorably toward a teacher's expectations when they are clear teacher affect is present. The absence of establishing/communicating expectations or lack of clarity in teacher expectations may result in misunderstandings about the course or the teacher, negative student perceptions of a teacher's competence, or conflict.

Online expectations. Because interaction is a crucial element of online courses, a substantial body of research regards explicit techniques to communicate expectations in virtual learning environments. Most online education scholars advocate the use of a communication and interaction plan (CIP; Boettcher & Conrad, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2005). CIPs can be beneficial and important in any learning environment, but are particularly useful when F2F time is reduced and/or eliminated in online courses.

Meager research discusses student expectancies. However, students indicate they want to understand an instructor's expectations, and an instructor should clearly communicate them (Friedrich & Cooper, 1999). Thus, although CIPs are primarily discussed in the online teaching literature, they have relevance and would be equally useful in the F2F learning environment too. There can be up to five parts of a CIP, which include (a) defining the preferred

methods of communication, (b) explaining how students should support one another in their social environment, (c) outlining expectations and rules for learning in online courses, (d) providing opportunities for building community, and (e) identifying where to get technical support (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010). A CIP is not necessarily a document that is created by an instructor for distribution to students, but rather, is a guide that helps an instructor conceptualize how they plan to interact with their students, how students should engage with one another, and participate in the course; these guiding procedures are communicated at all points during the term (early, middle, late) and disseminated in a variety of ways to students (e.g., course syllabus, assignment directions, etc.).

A best practice that emerges from online teaching literature is that of setting expectations about communication with an instructor, as alluded to when discussing F2F teacher expectations. Lawrence et al. (2005) indicated that preparing students for online learning may increase their chances of success in the course. Thus, the CIP is designed to get instructors to consider the ways that lines of communication can be opened up between teacher-student and potentially aid in the development of this interpersonal relationship. As an illustration, an instructor can set forth that open communication will take place via email and in person (if extremely personal in nature or in the case of discussing grades). Sharing preferred methods of communication helps students make sense of the various ways that an instructor and student can interact and which channel is most appropriate (e.g., email, in-person, Skype, etc.). Using a CIP as

a guide, instructors have the opportunity be clear(er) about their expectations for students' communication.

Unfortunately, in terms of online instruction, limited research concerns the implicit communication of expectations. This is likely due to the fact there are more opportunities to be explicit rather than implicit in online courses. The online learning environment can be an impersonal setting, but it has the potential to be a site of an interpersonal experience if thoughtfully promoted and supported. Through use of immediacy behaviors and cues, an instructor can verbally communicate their values surrounding the teacher-student relationship. Furthermore, it is crucial for teachers to convey their expectations about interaction in the online learning environment as it can help a student understand what kind of connection a student may be able to form with a teacher. Communicating closeness and expectations can help make the online classroom a location where mediated communication is interpersonal and meaningful learning can takes place as well.

As previously indicated, conflict management is an interpersonal skill that both scholars suggest and students deem necessary from their instructors (DeVito, 1986; Frymier & Houser, 2000). CIPs encourage an instructor's articulation of expectations and rules for learning along with the development of ways to build community. As a result, CIPs inherently help an instructor convey the way(s) that they manage conflict. For example, a CIP may include policies concerning topics that are considered points of conflict (e.g., grade dispute procedures). I now turn to a discussion of conflict and the manner in which it

transpires in various learning environments.

Conflict

As suggested in the introduction, certain aspects of online instruction are commonly researched as a part of establishing effective online teaching. Certainly, teacher presence, building online community, immediacy, and teacher expectations are central to establishing thriving teacher-student relationships. However, left unexplored are questions about the potential hazards (or consequences) if teacher-student relationships are not formed or go awry. The online learning environment seems to be a context in which there is room for an increase in maladaptive communication behaviors. Furthermore, there is little research to help us understand how those behaviors emerge, the consequences to the teacher-student relationship, or how they might be managed. A dimension of classroom communication that has been investigated very little is conflict, which has been the topic of infrequent instructional communication scholarship and less so in online contexts.

Conflict in the Classroom

Communication scholars have studied conflict that transpires in a variety of environments, surroundings, and situations; the classroom is not an exempt context in which conflict occurs. Though conflict has been defined in a variety of ways, instructional literature points to a primary reliance on Hocker and Wilmot's (1978) definition that conflict is "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and

interference from others in achieving their goals" (p. 9). The justification for the use of this particular definition is largely dependent on two factors. First, classroom conflict is considered present when it is communicated (via verbal or nonverbal communicative behaviors). Second, the definition suggests that conflict in the context of a classroom transpires due to two types of issues (i.e., relationship and content), which further necessitates communication skills as a necessary part of initiating, developing, and sustaining effective teacher-student relationships.

As Cooper and Simonds (2007) contended, in particular, instructional communication literature regarding conflict focuses on aspects of a learning environment that may invite conflict. Contributing factors drawn from research include power structures in the classroom, unclear or unfair classroom rules/policies, grading disputes, competition among/between students, desire for individual attention, differences in perception, and teacher misbehaviors (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Hocker, 1986; Kearney, Plax, & Allen, 2002; Wilmot, 1976).

Power. Thomas (1974) articulated the five events that occur in a conflict sequence: (1) party's frustration, (2) party's conceptualization of the conflict situation, (3) party's conflict behavior, (4) other's reaction, and (5) an outcome. Although Thomas' sequence offers a blueprint by which conflict is realized, communicated, and resolved, scholars echo Frymier and Houser's (2000) ideas regarding power and point out that often there is a lack of reciprocal power in the teacher-student relationship. Thus, even supposing a student may experience a conflict, because they perceive themselves to be less powerful than their teacher,

they may not communicate the conflict. A study by Wilmot (1976) supports the research on power and conflict. Wilmot found that students generally had a negative experience or position regarding conflict with a teacher. Students reported that teachers employed high-power tactics and they characterized conflict as a win-lose situation. Interestingly, after "losing" the conflict to the teacher, students did not utilize other means to "win" the conflict (e.g., revisit the issue with the instructor or secure a third-party intervention).

In a study about power and conflict in the teacher-student relationship, Jamieson and Thomas (1974) found that undergraduate students reported an uneven distribution of power between student and teacher and an "authoritarian mode of teacher influence" (p. 329). Graduate students did not report the same levels of teacher coercive power and instead reported more expert power of their teachers. This finding is not surprising given that graduate students are at a different level in their education where teachers focus less on authority and more on mutual respect (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974).

Group conflict in the online classroom. A scant line of research exists that specifically addresses one of Moore's (1989) types of interactions: learner-learner conflict in the F2F learning environment (see, e.g., Barfield, 2003; Colbeck, Campbell, & Bjorklund, 2000). Furthermore, even though student-student conflict has been examined, the focus of the present study is online learning environments; thus, this discussion now moves to the few studies of group conflict in online courses.

Investigating online communication courses, Kindred (2001) observed that

oftentimes, disagreements between students did not precipitate continuing conflict. Despite literature that suggests computer-mediated communication (CMC) can produce more unrestrained communication, the findings in Kindred's study did not support this. In fact, she noted that major conflict did not occur in the "public" places in the online course (e.g., ListServ or Discussion Board), although they occurred in "private" email conversations or phone calls between students. In other words, conflicts did not become confrontational in the virtual learning environment. In fact, students exhibited complimentary interactions where "students praised each other's ideas and positively critiqued each other's written contributions to the project" (Kindred, 2001, p. 116). At the end of the experience, students revealed that they preferred individual projects rather than group projects in order to eliminate conflict.

Another study examined conflict in collaborative groups in an online education course (Smith, 2003). Students who participated in the study readily voiced their understanding that not many people are comfortable with conflict, but also acknowledged that progress is a result of asking questions and disagreeing with one another. The issues surrounding the observed conflicts in this course were interpersonal in nature (e.g., leadership, different perspectives, uneven work contributions). Nonetheless, "when confronted with perceived conflict, participants in this study failed to discuss the underlying interpersonal issues" (Smith, 2003, p. 111) and in most cases either minimized or ignored the conflict altogether. The student approaches to group conflict are noteworthy in both of the aforementioned studies because they demonstrate avoidance (of both group

projects and group conflict) tendencies, a conflict management tactic (see conflict management discussion) that is generally viewed as a passive, unfruitful coping strategy to setting group progress in motion.

Smith (2003) asserted, “conflict is a naturally occurring event when people work together” (p. 109). In view of this perspective, it is important to bear in mind that student groups are not the only instance in which people work together in online courses. Likewise, instructors and students work with each other, thus making instructor-student conflict a worthy area of investigation.

Student Incivilities and Teacher Misbehaviors

As previously noted, research on classroom conflict reveals an emphasis on locating variables that generate conflict. One such element that presents a recurring pattern is incivility and teacher misbehavior. Incivility is used as a term in education that defines classroom behaviors that instructors find annoying, unacceptable, disrespectful, or rude (Ballantine & Risacher, 1993; Tiberius & Flak, 1999). In a likewise manner, classroom communication literature describes teacher misbehaviors as the conduct (what is said and done) that students do not like (Kearney et al., 2002). Meyers (2003) suggested that faculty members are often unprepared to handle student misbehaviors, which are “a common source of classroom conflict” (p. 94).

Interestingly, the bulk of the literature deals with student incivilities. In two separate studies, teachers were able to discern 24 distinct student incivilities (Ballentine & Risacher, 1993; Royce, 2000; see Appendix B). Research indicates that these categories are often composed of two dimensions, either

active or passive behaviors (Burroughs, 1990; Kearney et al., 1991). Active student incivilities are overt attempts to disrupt learning (e.g., side-talking in class, arriving late/leaving early, wasting class time, making harassing or vulgar comments to the teacher). On the other hand passive student incivilities tend to be more covert in nature (e.g., not paying attention to the teacher, sleeping in class, not attending class, demanding makeup exams or assignment extensions). Teachers dislike both types of student incivilities, although of the two they report preference for the passive incivilities (Kearney et al., 1991).

At first glance, the literature can mistakenly lead readers to believe that students are the sole perpetrators of incivilities. However, several scholars remind us that oftentimes students misbehave because their teachers do (Boice, 1996; Plax & Kearney, 1999). In other words, teachers misbehave too. A sample of 250 college students generated a list of over 1,700 teacher misbehaviors (Kearney et al., 1991; see Appendix C). These were coded and classified into 28 categories, which include three dimensions: (a) incompetent conduct (e.g., lack of demonstrating care about the course/student, not knowing student names, boring teachers), (b) offensive conduct (e.g., humiliating students, making arbitrary decisions, playing favorites with students), and (c) indolent conduct (e.g., arriving late for class, failing to grade student work in a timely manner, constantly readjusting assignments). The line of research on misbehaviors seems to capture the various actions (or inactions in some cases) that irritate, demotivate, or distract teachers and students in/out of the classroom; however, there appears to be a lack of research on student/teacher misbehaviors

in online learning environments. If misbehaviors are a precursor to conflict in the F2F class, it becomes crucial to then explore what instructor/student misbehaviors exist in the online classroom and if they serve as a similar indication that conflict may arise.

The F2F literature regarding teacher/student misbehaviors strongly suggests that there is a link between these transgressions and conflict in the learning environment. Despite that, scholarship has not yet explored such behaviors in the online learning environment. Much may be gleaned from identifying and exploring the behaviors of students and instructors in virtual courses in order to better understand the potential effects it has on learning and the ways that the information may be used in order to train and develop faculty who teach online courses.

Managing/Preventing Conflict

Conflict management. Another line of classroom conflict research has emphasized the various management styles that exist. Hocker (1986) asserted that conflict styles are developed through life experiences. Some research on conflict styles has suggested two to five styles. Most commonly used in the interpersonal conflict literature is the five-style approach based on Kilmann and Thomas' (1975) scales of concern for self and concern for other and identify five distinct conflict styles: (a) competition (pursuing one's concerns at the expense of others), (b) collaboration (cooperative and involving of the other person), (c) compromise (where concern for self and others are both moderate), (d) avoidance (behaving passively and nonassertiveness), and (e) accommodation

(giving into other person's concerns).

Several instruments exist in order to measure conflict style in a variety of settings: Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II (ROCI-II; Rahim, 1983), Management of Differences Exercise (MODE; Kilmann & Thomas, 1975), and the Putnam-Wilson Conflict Behavior Scale, which subsumes the styles from the Thomas-Kilmann styles "into a validated research instrument" (Hocker, 1986, p. 76). Jamieson and Thomas (1974) utilized the MODE instrument to measure conflict style of high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels of education. Overwhelmingly, students self-reported that they prefer avoiding conflict (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974). However, this finding may not be as salient as it was articulated 40 years ago. Because the teacher-student paradigm has moved toward a more student-centered approach to teaching, the formerly passive-dependent role may not be as prevalent in today's classrooms (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fink, 2003).

Furthermore, when a teacher utilizes collaboration during conflict management with students, the conflict episode can become a positive experience. Hocker (1986) suggested that productive conflicts might offer a set of circumstances in which the teacher (and perhaps the student) learns about their communication and can modify their behavior accordingly. She recommends avoiding treating every teacher-student conflict in this same manner, as this communicates "a high-powered, non-caring form of conflict management" (p. 79). Instead, using an approach that focuses on the process rather than the outcome and relationship goals of conflict may help determine a

solution amenable to both parties.

Conflict prevention. The literature on preventing conflict offers a valuable link to the aforementioned interpersonal aspects of teaching. Although immediacy was not necessarily directly mentioned, scholars suggested that teachers "communicate warmth and interpersonal sensitivity" (Meyers, 2003, p. 94) and "[decrease] students' anonymity by knowing and using [student] names" in the learning environment (Boice, 1996, p. 456). Similarly, scholars implied suggestions that establishing clear expectations with students may prevent conflict. For example, Meyers (2003) encouraged teachers to, "establish a shared course framework" (p. 95), Berger (2000) claimed a preventative measure included "mak[ing] it clear in your syllabus what behaviors are not acceptable in your course…[and] discuss[ing] these expectations on the first day of class" (p. 448), and Feldmann (2001) claimed setting ground rules is essential.

Scholarly publications regarding classroom conflict point to the various contributing factors that may spur conflict. In addition to the research on power and its effects on teacher-student conflict, a substantial amount of literature suggests both teacher and student misbehaviors have an effect on the emergence of conflict. Furthermore, even though conflict sometimes occurs in the teacher-student relationship, literature points to a connection between the implementation of effective interpersonal communication skills (e.g., immediacy and establishing expectations) and methods to manage and prevent conflict. Although this information aids in the understanding of conflict in F2F contexts, scholars have yet to explore the impetuses of conflict in online courses, the

methods used to negotiate conflict online, and the potential consequences that it has on both instructors and students.

Notably, the literature on classroom conflict and communication is primarily situated in the F2F classroom, largely ignoring the types of conflicts that transpire in online learning environments between teacher and student. Additionally, existing research widely ignores student experiences with conflict. Consequently, this research seeks to expand on the current understanding of conflict in classrooms and specifically seeks both teacher and student experiences and ideas regarding conflict in online learning contexts.

As the modern classroom continues to undergo changes as a result of current pedagogies and the influence of technology, it becomes crucial for communication scholars to consider the effects that this may have on conflict between students and instructors and learning. Thus, not only would research about conflict in online classrooms fill a gap in the literature regarding online learning settings, it also has the potential to address and expand on the relational domains of conflict research by incorporating an additional interpersonal conflict context.

The classroom conflict literature suggests the connection between teacher/student misbehaviors and conflict. Some of the incivilities/misbehaviors in the F2F context clearly will not be an issue in the online course. This leaves me to wonder whether there is a divergent set of teacher misbehaviors and student incivilities in the online learning environment and if overlapping features exist between what teachers and students report as other contributing factors to

conflict.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: In an online course, what teacher/student misbehaviors are present?
- RQ2: What contributing factors that lead to conflict between instructors and students are experienced in online courses?

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Research Design

Qualitative methods refer to the "collection, analysis, and interpretation of…data in order to understand and describe meanings, relationships, and patterns" (Tracy, 2013, p. 36) in which participants respond to "very open, non-directional questions" (Schreier, 2012, p. 25). This study uncovered meanings and patterns in incivilities/misbehaviors and conflict by investigating the ideas, perceptions, and experiences of both online instructors and students. Thus, using a qualitative approach to this study was appropriate. Through the use of online surveys and data collected from interviews with online instructors and students, this study sought to identify the student incivilities, instructor misbehaviors, and types of conflict that transpire in online courses. Because research on conflict in the classroom has largely been conducted in F2F learning environments, this research will expand on the current literature by investigating instructor and student involvement in courses that are facilitated completely online. Previous research has focused primarily on the teacher perspectives of conflict; this study included both the student and teacher perspectives and, more specifically, it considered the potential impacts that conflict has on the teacher-student relationship. Moreover, because the literature surrounding

student/teacher misbehaviors suggests a link to conflict, this study investigated the patterns of such behaviors. Given that research has not yet explored teacher-student conflict in online courses, this research was both exploratory and descriptive.

Sites

The University of Utah

I chose The University of Utah as the research site for this study largely due to its recent educational initiatives that have prompted an increase in the amount of online courses and programs available to students. Allen and Seaman (2014) reported that 66% of academic leaders believe online learning is "critical to their long-term strategy" (p. 3). Recently Dr. Ruth Watkins, the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, partnered with Teaching and Learning Technologies (TLT) and placed a call for online program and course proposals. The purpose of the request for proposals is described as a way to help "move the University of Utah to a more strategic level in online offerings, and ensure that we are well positioned to capitalize on opportunities in this area" ("UOnline Programs and Courses," 2014, ¶ 1). This initiative focuses on three strategic priorities, which include (a) online courses that reduce bottleneck, (b) baccalaureate programs that can be completed entirely online, and (c) professional masters programs that can be facilitated fully online and/or with limited synchronous components.

Prior to the UOnline initiative, individual instructors oftentimes proposed single online courses and received funding to develop and launch their course

with the guidance of TLT and The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE). However, given the online program and course strategy described above, it can be surmised that some departments may be focused on moving entire degree programs online. From this, it can be deduced that proper faculty development will be needed in the near future, further making the findings from this study potentially relevant to the training of online instructors.

Online Courses

Allen and Seaman (2014) clarified the difference between web-facilitated, hybrid, and online courses; online courses are defined as those where 80-100% of the content is delivered online. This definition aligns with the description of how online courses are administered at the University of Utah, as TLT describes an online course as one where all course work takes place online, except for some courses that require exams to be taken at the UOnline Center on main campus ("How Online Courses Work," 2014).

Online instructors and students have access to Canvas, which is a learning management system (LMS). Canvas is a web-based technology that allows instructors to post announcements, assignments, and grades; the content for online courses is designed and arranged via modules and/or pages within the LMS. Students using this technology have 24-hour access to their virtual classroom, can submit assignments on Canvas, communicate with other students and their instructor, and view their course at any time of day. For the purposes of this study, participants were sought from fully online courses.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board Approval

Because the design of this study required the participation of both students and instructors, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was necessary before proceeding with data collection. An application that outlined the purpose of the study, brief project explanation, description of participants, and proposed letters of consent (for both instructors and students) was submitted via the Electronic Research Integrity and Compliance Administration (ERICA) system on January 27, 2015. The IRB determined that the study was exempt (under Exemption Category 2) and approval was secured on February 2, 2015.

Data Collection

The research questions that guided this study were exploratory and thus required that participants share their ideas, perceptions, and experiences regarding conflict in online learning environments. Even though validated measures exist to measure instructor misbehaviors (Kearney et al., 1991), the purpose of this research was to uncover new categories that may exist uniquely in online learning contexts. Because the goal of this study was to gather preliminary data regarding instructor and student communicative behaviors in online learning contexts, open-ended online surveys were employed in order to collect data from the varying participant groups (i.e., teachers, students). Surveys are the most common data collection method in communication studies (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). Additionally, due to the nature of the online

context for this study, I decided to utilize online surveys because of the participants' possible proclivity towards mediated contexts.

The online surveys were launched on February 6, 2015 and closed on April 5, 2015. In order to recruit instructors into this study, I contacted each online instructor via email (see Appendix D) and requested their participation in an online survey, hosted by Qualtrics, an online survey platform. I sent the first round of emails to 241 instructors on February 6, 2015. After the initial emailing, 48 instructors participated in the online survey and three emails were bounced back to me with error messages that the email was invalid. A second round of emails were sent on March 1, 2015; however, this only round only produced 5 more participants. Although 53 instructors logged in to the online survey, 2 instructors did not consent to the first question and therefore were not permitted to complete the online survey (because of the filtering question). Thus, there were 51 instructor participants.

Likewise, students were asked to participate in an online survey for this study. I did not have access to a master list of students who have enrolled in online courses; therefore, a version of snowball sampling was employed (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). I worked to circulate a student recruitment email (see Appendix D) to as many instructors as possible so that they might pass it along to their current students. I also posted the recruitment email on Facebook (on the Graduate Student Advisory Committee page), sent a mass email to our department's communication graduate student listserv, and sent emails to other instructor colleagues. Finally, I was made aware of several departments and

colleges that actively recruit student participants for research; I contacted the Eccles School of Business, School of Education, and the Psychology department via phone and followed up via email requesting that they distribute the recruitment email to their undergraduate students. Of these three, the School of Education replied with confirmation that they had distributed the email to their current undergraduate student listserv. Because of the manner in which students were recruited, it is not possible to discern the total number of students who received the recruitment email. However, the final number of completed surveys was 137.

Online Qualtrics Surveys

Upon clicking on the link provided in the recruitment email, instructors/students were presented with an IRB-approved letter of consent (see Appendix E). The first question in the survey functioned as a filtering question and asked if participants read and understand the consent form and was willing to voluntarily participate in the study. In order to access the online survey, participants were required to click on “Yes” before the Qualitrics system would allow them to move on to the second question (see Appendix F). Similarly, the second question was also a filtering question that ensured that instructors/students had taught/taken at least one online course (in which 80% - 100% of the content was delivered online). Even though some demographic information was collected, the majority of the questions were open-ended so that participants had the opportunity to fully explicate their ideas, perceptions, and experiences. In total, both the instructor and student versions of the online

surveys included 11 questions, which included both demographic and open-ended questions (see Appendix F).

Follow-Up Interviews

As previously mentioned, many studies that explore conflict and misbehaviors do so from only one perspective. Therefore, I chose to triangulate and incorporate interviews into my study as a validity strategy.

In addition to gathering data from the online Qualitrics surveys, I posed a question in both the student and instructor versions of the survey that inquired if the participants would like to participate in a short interview via phone or F2F. Those interested provided their name and email address. Of the 51 instructor participants, 29 indicated that they were interested in participating in the follow-up interview. Of the 137 student participants, 15 expressed interest in participating in the follow-up interview.

Once the online surveys were closed, I sent follow-up emails to each of the participants on May 18, 2015 and 20 instructors agreed to meet for an interview. A follow-up email was sent to those participants who I did not hear back from on May 26, 2015. Two student participants agreed to an interview; however, 1 cancelled the day of their scheduled interview and the other did not return either of my email messages regarding establishing a time/date for their participation. Thus, the second emailing did not yield additional follow-up interview participants, nor did this process produce any student interviewees.

I audio-recorded each of the 20 semistructured interviews (see Appendix G for interview protocols), which each lasted 15-20 minutes. Participants chose

a meeting method (phone or F2F) and location. Eleven participants choose to meet F2F (i.e., in Room 1705A in the Marriott Library or in the instructor's office) and nine opted for phone interviews. During the interviews, I took extensive notes on a printed question protocol page. Because the interviews were used as a means of global triangulation in which I sought details that may have been absent in the online Qualtrics surveys, I did not transcribe the interviews. I referred to my notes during the coding period(s) and when considering supporting examples, I transcribed the necessary parts of the interviews for the results chapters.

Participants

All participants for this study, both students and instructors, were recruited because of their experience with online learning spaces at the University of Utah.

Online Instructors

The University of Utah's website allowed me to sort the courses being offered by course attributes ("Spring 2015 Class Schedule", 2014). The total sample of online teachers were recruited from 348 courses with the "ONLN" (online) course distinction slated for the spring 2015 semester at the University of Utah; approximately 241 instructors were scheduled to teach the online courses during the term during which data collection was happening. The difference in the number of the courses and the number of instructors can be accounted for by instructors teaching more than one section and/or more than one instructor in a single section of a course. The goal was to select a sample of online instructors

who represented a diverse range of departments, teaching ranks (i.e., graduate instructors, adjunct, professors), and online teaching experience.

Fifty-three online instructors participated in the study, which I recruited through email (see Appendix D). Although 53 instructors participated in the survey, every instructor did not fill in a response to each question; therefore, the descriptive statistics about the sample vary. Fifty-one instructors identified their position in the online survey; graduate teaching assistants were the largest group (*n* = 18; 35%), followed by various ranking professors (*n* = 15; 29%), adjunct instructors (*n* = 9; 18%), and career line professors (*n* = 9; 18%). The instructor participants also represented a variety of colleges from across campus: College of Humanities (*n* = 18; 35%), College of Nursing (*n* = 9; 18%), College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (*n* = 9; 18%), College of Health (*n* = 5; 10%), College of Social Work (*n* = 4; 8%), College of Fine Arts (*n* = 2; 4%), Honors College (*n* = 2; 4%), College of Science (*n* = 2; 4%), David Eccles School of Business (*n* = 1; 2%), College of Education (*n* = 1; 2%), School of Medicine (*n* = 1; 2%), College of Mines and Earth Sciences (*n* = 1; 2%), and the Gerontology Program (*n* = 1; 2%).

Furthermore, instructors indicated their online teaching history: 1 – 4 online courses (*n* = 23; 46%), 5 – 12 online courses (*n* = 12; 24%), and 12 or more classes (*n* = 16; 31%). Instructors also identified themselves in terms of mastery of online teaching as: novice (*n* = 7; 14%), intermediate (*n* = 25; 49%), and experienced (*n* = 19; 37%).

Online Students

Upon request, the Office of Budget and Institutional Analysis (OBIA) at the University of Utah provided me with current information regarding the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 enrollment in online courses. In Fall 2014, 8,100 students enrolled in online courses and in Spring 2015, 8,703 students. In total, 16,803 students on the University of Utah campus enrolled in an online course during the 2014-2015 academic year. This number of unduplicated students (non-repeating) over the two semesters totaled 12,659, which indicates that 40.17% of students at the University of Utah took an online class at least once during the 2014-2015 academic year.

Initially, 152 students logged on to participate in the online survey; however, Question 2 (see Appendix F) filtered out 5 students who had not taken at least one online course (in which 80% - 100% of the content was delivered online) and 137 students completed their survey. The majority of students identified as seniors (*n* = 72; 50%), followed by juniors (*n* = 44; 30%), graduate students (*n* = 13; 9%), sophomores (*n* = 12; 8%), and freshman (*n* = 4; 3%).

Because the survey was open to any current University of Utah student, participants reported a variety of majors. Even though 137 students completed their surveys, there were students who did not indicate a major and 5 students reported a double major. The majors of students who participated in this study included Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (*n* = 80), Communication (*n* = 22), Exercise and Sports Science (*n* = 9), Psychology (*n* = 5), Social Work (*n* = 4), Health, Society, and Policy (*n* = 3), Health, Promotion, and Education (*n* = 2),

Sociology (*n* = 2), Spanish Teaching (*n* = 2), Anthropology (*n* = 1), Art (*n* = 1), Business Administration (*n* = 1), Chemistry (*n* = 1), Computer Science (*n* = 1), Economics (*n* = 1), Electronic Arts Engineering (*n* = 1), Elementary Education (*n* = 1), Environmental and Sustainability Studies (*n* = 1), Family and Consumer Studies (*n* = 1), Health (*n* = 1), Health Education (*n* = 1), International Studies (*n* = 1), Linguistics (*n* = 1), Music Education (*n* = 1), Nursing Education (*n* = 1), Occupational Therapy (*n* = 1), Physical Education Teacher Education (*n* = 1), and Urban Planning (*n* = 1).

Data Analysis

Qualitative Content Analysis

I utilized qualitative content analysis to interpret the text (which data is referred to in qualitative content analysis) for this study. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) defined this analysis approach as a "subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). Specifically, I chose this analysis method because it allowed me to reduce my text by focusing on relevant aspects of the data (Schreier, 2012). Several forms of qualitative content analysis exist including: conventional content analysis, directed content analysis, and summative content analysis. For this analysis, I employed a directed content analysis. As the literature review indicates, there are already established patterns for F2F classroom conflict, student incivilities, and teacher misbehaviors. My coding utilized both previous categories and uncovered new or deviating categories specific to the online learning context.

Coding and Analysis

Prior to beginning the steps of coding, I read the text from the survey responses in order to make notes about ideas and themes that begin to emerge. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) pointed out, “Qualitative content analysis usually uses individual themes as the unit for analysis, rather than the physical linguistic units” (p. 3). Therefore, a coding unit was identified as an expression of an idea, which came in multiple forms (e.g., single word, phrase, sentence, etc.).

When only one researcher is coding material, Schreier (2012) suggests a 10 – 14-day break between first-level and second-level recoding. Therefore, I began first-level coding on April 28, 2015 and second-level coding commenced on May 19, 2015. The process began with first-level open coding, which Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). To assist in the coding stage of this research project, I utilized NVivo Version 10, which is a computer software program that manages data. At the close of first-level coding, I had generated the following amount of categories-subcategories: RQ1, Student Incivilities: 14 categories, 23 subcategories; RQ1, Instructor Misbehaviors: 9 categories, 40 subcategories; RQ2, Instructor-Reported Conflict: 14 categories, 0 subcategories; RQ2, Student-Reported Conflict: 15 categories, 0 subcategories (see Appendix H for codebook).

As I continued to code, categories were inductively developed from the text (i.e., instructor and student responses to open-ended questions), which included coding units that have similar meanings and connotations. I continually

revisited the categories and revised them as necessary, working to collapse categories that demonstrated a significant overlap. So that I had a clear description of each category and its dimensions, I kept a notebook in which I could adjust the descriptions. This step in analysis is a part of the constant comparative method, which Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) summed up as, "the systematic comparison of each text assigned to a category with each of those already assigned to that category, in order to fully understand the theoretical properties of the category; and integrating categories and their properties through the development of interpretive memos" (p. 4).

At several points during the coding process, I conducted checks of my coding to assess consistency and noted how the categories shifted subtly over time (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I noted some incivilities/misbehaviors did not fit my coding frame; therefore, I categorized them as outliers and they were not included in the final incivility/misbehavior categories. There were 6 student incivility outliers and 14 instructor misbehavior outliers (for examples of outliers, see Chapter 4). Additionally, there were conflict experiences that did not fit the coding frame for two reasons: (a) the participant reported they had not experienced conflict or (b) the participants' response did not include enough relevant information. In instructor-reported conflict, 7 participants reported no conflict and 2 participants did not provide enough information for their response to be considered. In student-reported conflict, 33 participants reported no conflict (however, see an extended discussion of this statistic in Chapter 6) and 8 participants did not provide enough information for their response to be

considered.

By the end of the second-level coding, I had collapsed my first-level codes into the following: RQ1, Student Incivilities: 9 categories, 16 subcategories; RQ1, Instructor Misbehaviors: 15 categories, 24 subcategories; RQ2, Instructor-Reported Conflict: 10 categories, 13 subcategories; RQ2, Student-Reported Conflict: 11 categories, 14 subcategories (see Appendix I for codebook).

Summary

Based on the exploratory nature of the research questions guiding this study, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most suitable method of inquiry. Because the responses collected were the result of primarily open-ended questions, qualitative content analysis was used to code and interpret the data. This chapter explicated my method selection and processes. Chapters Four and Five identify and describe the various categories that emerged from my analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS, PART ONE

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the findings that were revealed through a content analysis of data gathered from instructor and student online surveys and instructor interviews. This study was developed to explore both instructor and student concepts of incivilities and misbehaviors as well as consider the ties that such communicative behaviors have with conflict in online learning environments. My findings are divided into two chapters; this chapter will discuss student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors and Chapter Five will discuss the ways in which the patterns of incivilities and misbehaviors align with the contributing factors that lead to conflict between teachers and students in online courses.

Classroom incivilities are defined as “a speech or action that is disrespectful or rude” (Berger, 2000, p. 449) that are destructive, disruptive, cause discomfort and have the potential to “derail learning” (Boice, 1996, p. 459). Research in the areas of classroom incivilities has primarily been conducted in F2F classroom settings and thus, the first research question in my study sought to identify the incivilities that both students and instructors experience in online

RQ1: In an online course, what classroom incivilities are present?

In this chapter, I will describe the various online classroom incivilities that were

identified in this study. The categories presented below emerged from the participants' responses to questions that inquired about the communication behaviors of students and instructors. Classroom incivilities literature includes two categories: (a) those committed by students (student incivilities) and (b) those committed by instructors (referred to as instructor misbehaviors in the communication literature), both of which are defined and illustrated below.

Student Incivilities

The instructors who participated in my study generated a list of 115 classroom incivilities that are committed by students, six of which were identified as outliers (which did not fit the coding frame). Using qualitative content analysis, nine distinct categories emerged from the instructor responses, which were collected from the online survey and in individual interviews as well. Because instructor interviews were conducted with the same instructors who completed the online survey, new comments did not emerge (with the exception of one comment, see Acts of Dishonesty section). Instead, instructor interviews were used to support and provide elaboration about the incivilities generated by the survey responses.

The sections below include descriptions and examples generated by instructors; I present the sections in descending order based on the frequency of comments in each categories (see Table 4.1). I used the preexisting framework for identifying active and passive student incivilities to distinguish between behaviors that were overt (i.e., attempts to disrupt learning) and covert behaviors (i.e., not openly displayed; Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1971) in online

Table 4.1: Student Incivility Categories with Sample Descriptions and Frequencies

Category Name and Sample Descriptions	Frequency/ Percentage
Does Not Read Course Materials Does not read course materials, asks questions without checking the LMS for information, and sends excessive emails regarding material posted on LMS.	**29; 26.61%**
Unprofessional Communication Communication that is disrespectful, overly informal, lacks identifying information, hostile or bullying in nature, and/or demanding.	**24; 22.02%**
Complaints Protests the course, refuses to accept grades, and/or criticizes exams/assignments.	**14; 12.83%**
Writes Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts Discussion posts that are offensive, critical of classmates' posts, lack an informed position, and/or are not meaningful.	**11; 10.09%**
Offers Excuses Makes excuses for incomplete or late assignments.	**9; 8.26%**
Requests Accommodations Communication requests extensions or accommodations, offers excuses for late work, and/or asks for special favors.	**9; 8.26%**
Lack of Communication Does not communicate with instructor, ignores instructor emails, unaware of instructor feedback, waits until last minute to communicate concerns/questions about assignments, and/or refuses F2F communication with instructor	**6; 5.50%**
Ineffective Communication Lacks ability to ask specific questions, does not clearly convey needs, and/or explain the steps that have already been taken.	**5; 4.59%**
Acts of Dishonesty Does not tell the truth about being able to access course information via LMS and acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism).	**2; 1.83%**

courses.

Does Not Read Course Materials

The most commonly reported type of student incivility was that students do not read (or view) course content (*n* = 29). In an online class, all course content is delivered via the LMS (i.e., Canvas) in a variety of ways: text, videos, links, and visual representations. Ideally, a student engages with the content that an instructor posts for their students. However, when students do not read the material provided by their instructor, this (in)action is considered a passive incivility. That is, the students' behavior can be considered covert because it is usually not revealed to the class at large.

Three comments in this category were in regards to the general ways that students who do not read the course materials posted by their instructors on the LMS. Instructors expressed that students "do not read my emails and announcements" (Survey Participant #14) and "do not read the syllabus, course outline…whether it's exam/assignment directions or questions…course material, etc." (Survey Participant #26).

One way that not reading course content is evidenced is in the way(s) that students complete assignments incorrectly, which was the basis for three of responses in this category. An instructor explained, "I am annoyed by students who do not read instructions, and consequently, do the assignment wrong" (Survey Participant #17). Another instructor observed that "[students] show they are not reading instructions by doing exactly what I assigned them not to do" (Survey Participant #53).

In some instances, instructors specify the platform for contacting them (e.g., Canvas message or campus email). Students who do not read the syllabus or engage with the introductory module may not know these expectations and therefore communicate using the incorrect platform. This can create an occurrence where the instructor does not get the email (or respond to it) in a timely manner. One online instructor explained that students contact them in a panic "…via email when they haven't been participating in the online classroom, where I ask that all communications occur" (Survey Participant #53). A different instructor offered that they didn't like students "commenting with questions on assignments or announcements rather than writing me an email or Canvas message…because Canvas does not alert me when people do that" (Survey Participant 22). In other words, two comments in this category discussed students using the incorrect messaging platform as another way in which students demonstrate they have not first read the instructions or course materials that explicate the preferred communication channels for the courses.

Twenty-one instructors indicated that student emails were a third way in which students demonstrated they did not read course content. Instructors described student messages that inquire, "where to find details that are clearly offered, they seem like they haven't made an effort to find the info" (Survey Participant #35), ask "questions without checking the syllabus and announcements" (Survey Participant #22), and "Emails that show the student didn't read the instructions/materials posted" (Survey Participant #50). Survey Participant #36 shared that students "…appear to not have the ability or desire to

attempt to solve problems or learn the material on their own using the resources provided, and instead call and/or email their instructor multiple times per day/week with seemingly simple questions" (Survey Participant #36). This account sheds light on why this particular type of student behavior may be viewed as an incivility by instructors.

Additionally, the instructor comments in this category concerned the amount of emails in online courses, which was described as a "repeated need for explanation of rules and schedule, students don't seem to follow instructions well" (Survey Participant #25). One instructor remarked that, when they inquired about whether or not students have attempted to access the information prior to the email,

> …inevitably the answer is no. This is frustrating, because it took a lot of time to create the screencasts, so there would be less confusion, and it did not seem to affect the confusion at all. In addition, I spent a lot of time answering these emails from students re-explaining something that I have already clearly outlined... (Survey Participant #20)

Furthermore, this instructor voiced concern that the side effect of these types of emails is that it ultimately takes time away from those students whose questions are not easily located in the already-posted material (e.g., struggling with course concepts). In other words, instructors felt that when students do not read or view the materials online not only does it create additional work for an instructor, but it may also monopolize an instructor's time and prevent them from responding to more pressing emails.

Unprofessional Communication

The second category of student incivilities that emerged from instructor responses was unprofessional communication (*n* = 24). This category is considered an active incivility, given the three main characteristics of the action, which indicate that the communicative nature of unprofessional communication is disrespectful, overly casual communication, and demanding of instant instructor response.

Disrespectful communication. Eleven instructors' responses identified their students' communication, particularly in emails, as lacking in respect. For example, Survey Participant #30 commented, "Communication tends to be much more rude and entitled when they don't have to sit down and talk to you directly." Instructors reported a certain tone that students use in emails. The tone was described as terse and "less respectful than in other [F2F] courses" (Interview Participant #3), which left the instructor feeling as though they were being treated "like customer service or something…maybe not so respectful tone or things like that…" (Interview Participant #10). In illustrating the nature of disrespectful emails, Interview Participant 3 explained that emails were perceived as confrontational. For example, disrespectful communication included blaming phrases such as "Your videos don't work" or "I can't find the instructions for this assignment anywhere. You don't have the them…in the syllabus." That is, "you" language was considered unprofessional in nature.

Instructors identified a final characteristic of disrespectful communication, which included messages with hostile elements. Instructors reported that some

student communication gave the impression that students "… feel they can bully their instructors through threats or other written accusations" (Survey Participant #37) and behave in inappropriate ways that include emails/messages that "are not only accusatory or belligerent but in all caps" (Survey Participant #53). One instructor described an experience with a confrontational student:

> A specific example of this would be the student I had a few semesters ago who was angry about quiz grades and my refusal to reverse a grade because he thought a question was confusing. I didn't save the messages, so I can't give exact quotes, but I remember that he called me stupid and a hypocrite. (Survey Participant #34)

In other words, hostile, blaming, and aggressive communication was seen as unprofessional, and therefore a student incivility.

Overly informal communication. A second characteristic of unprofessional communication is that it is overly informal, which accounted for six instructor comments. Instructors pointed out that this type of communication occurs in two primary locations: emails and written assignments (e.g., essay exams, discussion board posts). Informal emails were described as casual messages "that read like text messages to friends" (Survey Participant #37). Despite syllabi blurbs and modeling of professional communication (Interview Participant #9), instructors commented that students composed emails that addressed the instructor by first name/without a title or no name at all (e.g., "Hey" or "Hi Teacher"; Survey Participant #13), lacked a subject line, did not include a sign-off, used text speak or abbreviations (e.g., LOL), employed poor netiquette form (e.g., typing message in all caps), and did not follow basic grammar/spelling conventions. Furthermore, instructors explained that student correspondence

lacks in identifying information. As an illustration, an instructor provided an example of one such email:

> To: instructor@utah.edu
> From:SuperFlyHottie@2Buff4You.com
> Subject: (blank)
> Message: How do you figure out the answer to Question #4?

In this case, the student could not be identified because the email was sent from an ambiguous email address and did not include sign off with the student's name (Survey Participant #32). When explaining why receiving student emails from unknown email addresses is a challenge for instructors, Interview Participant #2 said,

> …a few will email from Yahoo and Gmail accounts. I usually request they don't because sometimes that stuff gets sent to spam. So I tell them pretty early, I'm like, 'email from Canvas' um, if you can, and if you don't that's ok, but email me from your UNID email because of that issue and I do check my spam like everyday especially at the beginning of the semester 'cause I get tutti-frutti@yahoo or something every semester.

Furthermore, Interview Participant #13 explained their attempts at modeling professional behavior by addressing students by name in discussion board posts and emails. Additionally, that same instructor stated that they establish rules about communication and said, "I do expect them to contact me, call me by name, use a proper title, address me with full sentences…I get a lot of messages that are not that" (Interview Participant #13). In other words, instructors receive overly informal student messages regardless of the fact that instructors address professional communication through modeling and clear communication of their expectations.

Moreover, course assignments were written with casual communication

similar to that found in student emails. Instructors described student communication in papers, written exams, and discussion posts as work that lacked a demonstration of fundamental academic form (e.g., spelling errors, poor grammar, and lack of punctuation). An instructor explained, "…students assume that because a course is online, that papers can be written like an email. There is something missing in terms of their understanding of the formality of a course when it is in an online setting" (Survey Participant #38).

Demanding instant communication. The final characteristic of unprofessional communication is defined as communication that is demanding of an instantaneous response. Two instructor responses opined that student communication expressed insistence for an immediate reply from the instructor, rather than requesting one. An instructor explained that this sort of email tends to come from students who "[send] an e-mail at 11:00 pm and [expect] a response on the same evening" or those whose messages are in regards to "a situation in which the student's own action resulted in an 'emergency'" (Survey Participant #31). Such emails contained demanding language such as "[need] an answer right away" (Survey Participant #31) or "Get back to me ASAP" (Survey Participant #1).

In elaborating on demanding student communication behaviors, one instructor described that students expect "…me to be awake at 2 am to respond to their [emails], even though we set up the expectation [for] 48 hours…" (Interview Participant #6). Similarly, an instructor shared:

> When an instructor has posted how to contact them on a class, quite often will include an email and will include a cell number for

> emergency purposes, but when a student bypasses the email for simple basic questions and instead sends constant text messages to the instructor anticipating an immediate response will come from that route rather than an email that's very annoying. (Interview Participant #12)

In this account, the instructor interpreted the student's behavior as purposely violating the instructor's communication guidelines in an attempt to induce a speedy response via an alternate communication channel.

From the accounts of unprofessional communication, 5 instructors in this category cited the lack of F2F contact in regards to students' unprofessional communication behavior(s). For instance, instructors asserted "It seems students are less courteous when they have not met you face to face" (Survey Participant #16), "students are a lot more sassy and critical when they aren't communicating with instructors face-to-face!" (Survey Participant #30), and "I don't think this type of behavior would happen in person" (Survey Participant #4). When describing potential explanations for the lack of professional communication, Survey Participant #8 explained, "In online courses it is more difficult to develop rapport and therefore humanize yourself to your students" while another instructor noted, "I'm personally of the opinion that this is due to the lack of face threat" (Survey Participant #35). In other words, the impersonal nature of online courses may offer us a perspective that can help us understand the basis for unprofessional student communication.

Complaints

Two types of complaints emerged as student incivilities (*n* = 14). Instructors described complaints as communication in which students convey

that they "…are very irritated" (Survey Participant #30), or "…are disgruntled" (Survey Participant #26); such expressions are commonly in regard to the course or grades and are therefore classified as an active incivility.

Complaints about the course. Six of the instructors whose responses concerned student complaints commented in regard to two major types of complaints about the course. First, students complain about the course being too demanding. In these types of complaints, students lament not only the difficulty level of the work, but also about the amount of work required for online courses. For example, Survey Participant #9 explained, "It seems like an online course is treated as a low priority, or unimportant as compared to other courses." In describing student complaints, one instructor recalled a student complaint that surfaced in the end-of-semester student course feedback:

> In the online course, I have gotten every semester, I get at least one student that says 'I just didn't have time to sit down for three hours of lecture' and you know this that and the other and I'm like but…it's a three-hour class…there seems to be a disconnect between the fact that a sit-down course and an online course are actually the same thing. (Interview Participant #2)

From this instructor's perspective, students may not have an understanding that online courses have an equivalent workload to F2F courses.

Second, instructors expressed that student complaints were usually communicated directly to the instructor via email or LMS/Canvas message. However, while most complaints take place privately, some students choose to complain publicly. "Public" areas in an online course include Announcement threads to which any student can reply or as Survey Participant #28 pointed out, "course-wide discussion posting," where students can air their grievance to the

entire class. In addition to responding to public complaints, instructors may attempt to manage student complaints via other communication channels. However, one instructor shared their displeasure with students who will not make an appointment for a phone/Skype/F2F meeting "…[because it] is much more effective in working through any issue which is upsetting a student" (Survey Participant #26). From these examples, it is evident that online instructors understand the limitations of certain types of communication and the potential effects that it may have on student complaints as well.

Complaints about grades. Another type of complaint is one in which students object about a grade that was earned, which accounted for eight comments in this category. The first characteristic of this type of complaint is that they tend to be accusatory in nature, which is often a result of a negative reaction to the assessment of their work. In complaining about grades, students may attempt to find fault in instructor's questions and/or exams. For example, an instructor shared an experience in which a student claimed that they had asked a classmate about a particular problem and when neither student could come up with an answer, they believed this to be an implication that the question was unreasonable (Survey Participant #14). Another instructor described this as an incivility because students attributed the grade to the instructor's inability to compose a good exam question. For example, a student wrote to an instructor and said: "question #_ is unfair'…'the answer is not in the reading materials, and I have looked for it x number of times" (Survey Participant #18). The next characteristic of grade complaints is that they are baseless or unreasonable.

Survey Participant #19 recalled that a student once complained about a single point on an assignment and argued, "…the point should not be taken because this is the first time s/he made the mistake." In cases such as this, students refuse to self-examine the errors they made that led to the point deduction/earned grade. The final characteristic of grade complaints is that students do not understand the protocol they should follow when grieving a final course grade. According to University of Utah Policy 6-400, Section IV-B, the first step in any grade grievance is to discuss the issue with the instructor, yet at times, students will attempt to supersede the instructor by going over their "head to the department chair to have a grade changed" (Survey Participant #33).

Writes Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts

The next category of student incivilities is clustered around students who write inappropriate discussion board posts (*n* = 11). The types of inappropriate discussion posts are considered active incivilities because of the overtly negative nature of the communication that transpires in such posts. Two characteristics emerged in regard to student posts: lack of meaningful responses and offensive or overly critical posts.

Lack of meaningful response. Four instructor comments addressed discussion posts, which were described as inappropriate, lacked meaningful responses because the responses were "overly polite to each others' posts" (Survey Participant #3), or demonstrated signs that the student responded without completing the appropriate readings. In many online classes, instructors ask their students to engage in dialogue with their classmates, usually via the

Discussion Board. Student responses that were excessively polite consisted of messages such as “I really like your post” (Survey Participant #3) or “’I agree’ or ‘Right on!’” (Survey Participant #17) and lacked in any significant or reflective communication. Moreover, one instructor commented that polite responses were written “regardless of the quality of the post” (Survey Participant #3). The other type of responses that were not meaningful were those posted by a student whose comments did not demonstrate any connection to the course content. For example, Survey Participant #52 explained that students compose discussion posts where it is evident that “…the student has not read the material so the response is very generic and oftentimes inaccurate” or that students “respond to prompts using commonplace understanding of terms that are clearly defined in the texts” (Survey Participant #3). In other words, instructors expected posts to be informed by the course readings, not only situated in personal experience.

Offensive or overly critical posts. Seven comments in this category focused on offensive discussion posts, which included language or ideas that were racist (Survey Participant #11), sexist, vulgar (Survey Participant #4), insulting, or assumptive (Survey Participant #32) in nature. Often these types of discussion posts were biased and the instructor (or other students) in the online discussion “called out” the post for not being grounded in fact and/or course content. One instructor recalled

> There have been times that I have had to privately inform a student that a remark was inappropriate; generally, I was able to invoke the approach we take in class which is an objective one. In other words, I tell that student that they need to leave their biases out of it and focus on the facts. (Survey Participant #40)

Instructors also considered posts that were overly critical as inappropriate. An instructor shared that student posts were, at times, disparaging of other faculty or professionals in their field and that student comments ranged from simple disagreements with the faculty/professional and "under the worst of circumstances they [made] personal, derogatory comments" (Interview Participant #6). Discussion posts were also considered uncivil if they criticized "others…for the quality of work submitted" (Survey Participant #36), as this is not the job of the student, but of the instructor.

Offers Excuses

Instructors indicated that a student incivility occurs when a student makes an excuse of some sort after an assignment is due or without enough time for the instructor to respond (*n* = 9). In the case of student incivility, an excuse is an attempt by a student to defend or justify an action. Offering excuses is considered a passive student incivility, as it is often a mild disruption or annoyance for the instructor and is usually covertly conveyed in one-on-one communication with the instructor.

Two instructors' responses noted that excuses are offered for incomplete or late assignments (Survey Participant #6). An instructor explained that offering excuses is normally a patterned student behavior in regard to time:

> For my classes, I always set things up in a Monday-Sunday week-by-week schedule. Invariably, I will have students that don't visit the class website or read messages and announcements I've made until Sunday night, when they hardly have any time left to work. That's when I receive the excuse emails about how they didn't find out that they needed to do this or that in preparation and so their assignments are late. (Survey Participant #34)

Instructors often recognized this as an incivility because the timing of student excuses seem to peak at particular points during a class such as around the time of assignment due dates and exam periods. That is, if students' excuses were offered at a different time (i.e., prior to due dates), they may not have been perceived as an uncivil behavior.

Beyond the timing of student emails with excuses, seven instructor responses indicated that the second type of student excuses centered around three explanations: illness, family death, or technology. Even in online courses, where physical presence is not required on campus, a common excuse that is offered by students is that they unable to login to the LMS/Canvas due to illness. In regards to family deaths, one instructor commented, "I can't tell you how many grandparents die right before finals. It seems like more than one would expect" (Survey Participant #16). Another instructor summed up their experience with emails that offer excuses by stating, "Sadly, several of these emails indicate a death in the family…or a number of dramatic reasons for the absence or lack of submissions. This also makes me, as the instructor, a bit more callous and unbelieving" (Survey Participant #36). Instructor accounts of emails that contained student excuses indicated that instructors are not convinced of all student excuses, but are oftentimes left without a way of verifying it. Lastly, instructors indicated that online students blame technology as the culprit of late assignments. For example, students will claim that their Internet went out or they lacked an Internet connection, Canvas wasn't working, or that they encountered computer troubles. The similarity between the various types of excuses is that

such communication of issues generally occurred after an assignment was due and is usually a precursor to a request for an accommodation, which is discussed in the next category.

Requests Accommodations

Student requests for accommodations are often connected with the previous theme of offering excuses (*n* = 9). Instructors conceptualized accommodation requests as instances in which a student requests "special exceptions" (Survey Participant #33) or "special treatment" (Survey Participant #42). The request is often accompanied by an excuse that is utilized in an attempt to justify the request and thus is also categorized as a passive incivility.

Five instructor comments focused on one type of accommodation, those that appealed for extensions on assignments or for late assignments to be accepted (i.e., after the due date has already passed). An instructor explained their annoyance with the excessive requests for late work:

> Another thing that aggravates me is that I don't accept any late work, I have a lot of stuff to grade, I have a lot of papers to take care of…you know, we all have our lives and I feel as if the current class of students feels um…uh, not empowered, but entitled [to exceptions]. (Interview Participant #19)

In commenting about students who want to "catch up at the end of the semester," Survey Participant #39 commented that students often assume "that the course is at their own pace." Requests for extensions and/or exceptions to submit late work was considered an incivility because the student knowingly disregarded the "no late work" policies included in the course syllabus, which include acceptable reasons for such accommodations (e.g., documented medical excuses or

university-sanctioned events).

Other types of accommodation requests came in the form of asking for special favors, which accounted for four instructor comments. Instructors observed that students requested "changes to [the] schedule in order to fit traveling/remote students" (Survey Participant #25), appeals for extra credit so that they may "do something to improve their grade" (Survey Participant #16), routine emails from students requesting permission to add an online class beyond the course cap (Survey Participant #2), and contacting the instructor in the last weeks of class to ask for an "I" (i.e., incomplete for a grade) even though the student has not met the criteria for this mark (Interview Participant #8).

Lack of Communication

Online instructors identified lack of communication as an uncivil student behavior, which is considered an active incivility given that it is an overt decision to not reciprocate communication on the student's end (*n* = 6). Oftentimes student communication is absent altogether until there is an issue and when communication does take place it is at the last minute, which, as mentioned earlier, is then often demanding of an immediate response. Three instructors (50% in this category) characterized the lack in student communication as, "waiting until the last minute to convey confusion over an assignment or ask for help" (Survey Participant #1) or describe students who "…are often uncommunicative until the very last minute" (Survey Participant #49). That is, students fail or are unsuccessful in communicating "… in a timely manner regarding problems or issues that might affect their performances in the class"

(Survey Participant #33).

One way that online instructors attempt to connect with students is via the discussion board or through their feedback regarding student work. However, when students do not reciprocate the communication and ignores emails, instructors may view this as an incivility (Survey Participant #37). Interview Participant #16 shared that their attempts to communicate with students in a one-on-one manner went widely disregarded:

> …if I respond to their discussion posts and ask them a question or kind of give them some personal information about me that hopefully establishes rapport or kind of get that interpersonal relationship going um, the majority of them don't seem to like read my feedback or even, like, or at least respond to it.

Another manner in which instructors seek connection with students is via means other than email or Canvas message. In particular, instructors in this study maintained that they utilized immediacy and encouraged phone, Skype, or F2F communication with their online students when there seemed to be a deep misunderstanding or if a student voiced a concern. However, instructors also expressed that some students "won't agree to make a phone meeting with or face-to-face meeting with me to discuss the issue(s) with me" (Survey Participant #26); in these instances, a lack of communication is viewed as a deliberate action to avoid communication with an instructor.

Ineffective Communication

The eighth category that emerged as a student incivility was the inability to communicate effectively (*n* = 5). In this category, ineffective communication is described as a message to an instructor that is unclear or obscure in some

manner (Survey Participant #22) or demonstrates an “inability to ask specific questions” (Survey Participant #12). This category of incivility is regarded as passive because of its covert nature. Ineffective communication often requires the instructor to guess what the student was thinking and requires additional communication in order to clarify the student’s question.

Instructors expressed frustration that students lack the ability to ask specific questions that clearly delineate their needs and provide context for their communication. Instructors remarked that vague questions include examples such as, “What am I doing wrong?” or “I don’t have any idea about this problem” (Survey Participant, #14). In the latter example, it is difficult to discern whether or not the student is making a statement or asking a question. For example, one instructor pointed out that students “are not able to explain what they would like (more time, support or advice, a simple conversation)” (Survey Participant #5).

Additionally, instructors voiced irritation about emails that lack in context. Instructors commented that students do not explain specifics about what they do not understand (e.g., what module they are working in, what assignment they are referring to), nor do students include details regarding the steps that they have already taken or tried (Survey Participant #14). In these instances, the students’ ineffective communication led to an instructor’s frustration because they were unable to determine how to proceed in answering the students’ question, which necessitated responding to an email with follow-up questions (rather than an answer) in order to gain clarity about the student’s question/concern. In understanding that some questions require more than an email, Interview

Participant #14 explained that ineffective communication can sometimes be mitigated by a phone call or Skype session in order to more quickly address the students' needs/questions.

Acts of Dishonesty

The final category of student incivilities was identified as dishonesty (*n* = 2). Two types of dishonesty were discerned: dishonesty about course access and academic dishonesty.

Dishonesty about course access. One instructor conveyed their experience with this type of incivility:

> A student clearly lied to me about not having access to an assignment before it was due…when I looked at her Access Report, it was clear to me that she had accessed the assignment the day before it was due multiple times. Her ignorance of my ability to see what she had actually done in the course allowed her to think she could get away with this deception. (Survey Participant #51)

Generally, students are not aware that an instructor can retrieve information regarding their LMS access. Interviews with instructors revealed that access reports are used in order to substantiate the fact that a student has acted dishonestly. In this case, because the student lied and attempted to purposefully deceive the instructor, dishonesty was recognized as a student incivility.

Academic (dis)honesty. The second act of dishonesty was the only example that emerged from an instructor interview, which described an incivility not previously identified in the data from the online surveys. Interview Participant #8 stated, "I have had a couple instances of plagiarism…[students] assumed that you can copy and paste from another website." This behavior is subject to

student sanctions as covered in the University of Utah Policy 6-400, Section V-A (Student Code), which states that students are expected to "…adhere to generally accepted standards of academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, research misconduct misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating." Both types of dishonesty were considered active incivilities as each were viewed as intentional student behaviors that attempted to mislead the instructor and as such, compromised the integrity of the course and broke from the student behavior standards set forth by the university.

Outliers

Six instructor comments were not classifiable. That is, the response did not fit a category, did not align with other comments, and/or did not offer enough elaboration or exploration of an action that could be categorized as an incivility. Comments in the outliers included remarks such as, "In some cases I am not sure whether more flexibility /a conversation/seeking better understanding/etc is going to be helpful and I am sometimes unsure how to explain this to a student through online communication" (Survey Participant #5); "And, some take a while to put aside the fear of having no tests, rather being held accountable for in-depth homework responses and blogging with depth" (Survey Participant #15); "I was a TA for one course where the on-line portion had never been synced with the syllabus…students would write to complain but the prof did not like on-line and did not want to be bothered" (Survey Participant #24); and "some students apologize for emailing me and asking questions. I don't find this annoying as

much as I do frustrating" (Survey Participant #3).

The aforementioned descriptions and examples provide a clearer understanding of the student incivilities that exist in an online course. However, as the literature suggests, students oftentimes misbehave because their instructors misbehave too (Boice, 1996; Plax & Kearney, 1999). In the next part of this chapter, I explore instructor misbehaviors.

Instructor Misbehaviors

The other types of classroom incivility include those that are committed by instructors. The students who participated in the online survey generated a list of 198 instructor misbehaviors, 14 of which were outliers. Using qualitative content analysis, 15 distinct categories were created from the student responses (see Table 4.2).

Unsatisfactory Responses

The most commonly identified instructor misbehavior addressed unsatisfactory instructor responses (*n* = 35). Students' comments about unsatisfactory responses revolved around three main characterizations: untimely responses, unresponsive or unavailable instructors, or unhelpful responses.

Untimely responses. Of the 35 student responses in this category, 16 of the comments were in regard to an instructor's untimely response. In general, students commented about how long it took for their instructor to respond to their message(s). Unspecific comments in regard to response time included, "not responding to e-mail communications in a timely manner" (Survey Participant

Table 4.2: Instructor Misbehavior Categories with Sample Descriptions and Frequencies

Category Name and Sample Descriptions	Frequency/ Percentage
Unsatisfactory Responses Instructor takes too long to respond, is unresponsive or unavailable, and/or responds in an unhelpful manner.	**35; 19.02%**
Frequency of Communication Instructor communicates too much and/or lacks in communication with students.	**29; 15.76%**
Unclear Expectations Instructor does not provide assignment instructions that are straightforward.	**28; 15.22%**
Teaching Methods Uses boring video lectures, requires group work, posts disengaging recorded slideshows, and/or only teaches for one learning style.	**12; 6.52%**
Inadequate Feedback Instructor does not provide individualized feedback, does not provide positive/constructive comments on graded work, and/or does not provide feedback in a timely manner.	**11; 5.98%**
Unorganized Course Overloads LMS/Canvas with online materials, does not organize materials in course folders, and/or does not organize course using modules or menu options.	**11; 5.98%**
Busy Work and Unreasonable Assignment Requirements Instructor assigns busy work and/or subjective assignments, does not give students enough time to complete work.	**10; 5.43%**
Neglectful Conduct Instructor does not follow through, is inconsistent, and/or demonstrates a lack of caring or patience when working with students.	**10; 5.43%**
Inconsistent or Conflicting Due Dates Conflicting due dates are posted on LMS/Canvas, assignments are due at awkward times.	**10; 5.43%**
Returns Work Late Returns graded work late and/or does not update grades on LMS/Canvas.	**8; 4.35%**
Lack of Technical Expertise Instructor posts broken links, cannot resolve technical problems.	**6; 3.26%**

Table 4.2: Continued

Category Name and Sample Descriptions	Frequency/ Percentage
Unreasonable Course Requirements Does not consider student means, requires students to take on-campus/proctored exams, does not respect holidays, and/or requires checking LMS/Canvas everyday.	**6;** **3.26%**
Messaging Platforms Uses mixed platforms and/or only communicates through LMS/Canvas.	**3;** **1.63%**
Lack of Flexibility Unwillingness to extend deadlines and/or release all online course content at the beginning of the course.	**3;** **1.63%**
Unprofessional Communication Communication that is too casual and/or is insulting towards students.	**2;** **1.09%**

#39), “[taking] a long time to email me back” (Survey Participant #30), “When the professors forget or take a long time to get back to you” (Survey Participant # 68), and “When instructors ignore or take a long time to reply to questions” (Survey Participant #124). One student offered a glimpse into understanding why students view untimely responses as a misbehavior when they articulated how it makes them feel and stated, “Instructors that do not get back to you in a timely matter-it gets frustrating when you can't reach the instructor for help, sometimes with online classes you feel like you are all on your own” (Survey Participant #61). Although most students did not provide specifics with regard to what they deemed as an untimely response, some did offer clues regarding how long they have had to wait for an instructor response. For example, Survey Participant #6 commented, “I also don’t like when they give you contact information and they take days to respond.” In a similar vein, a student explained that they encountered instructors who “only respond once a week” to emails (Survey Participant #145).

Students were not explicit in defining their expectations regarding timely responses. Nonetheless, several of their responses seemed to suggest their ideas about response time. For example, students conveyed that they “…did not like to have answers for my questions with [a] three day delay” (Survey Participant # 51) or asking questions about an assignment when they don’t get a response ASAP (Survey Participant #49). More specifically, 1 student expressed annoyance when they experienced an instructor “not answering emails within 24 hours” (Survey Participant #54).

Unresponsive or unavailable instructor. Thirteen of the comments about unsatisfactory instructor responses were in regard to an instructor who is unreachable or unavailable. The first type of student response centered on instructors who are nonresponsive to student messages. For instance, students commented, “professors do not respond back to emails” (Survey Participant #100) and “The most annoying thing is when an instructor WILL NOT RESPOND” (Survey Participant #88).

Several student responses identified why nonresponsiveness is perceived as a misbehavior. First, students believe that it is a barrier to their understanding of course assignments and impactful to the subsequent grades of said assignments as well. One student explained that they were left to figure out how to complete an assignment when they “…encountered a teacher who would not respond to questions posted on assignment announcement. It forced me to guess and just hope that I had done things right” (Survey Participant #75). Similarly, a student commented how the lack of an instructor’s response was detrimental to their grade on an assignment:[2]

> Personally i do not like when a teacher does not get back wit you about an assignment, for example i did not understand what the teacher was asking of us and i just needed more understanding of the assignment and i emailed her several times and the assignment was due at the end of the week and she never got back to me and i had to turn it in incomplete and got a poor grade on it. (Survey Participant #81)

Second, nonresponsiveness was viewed negatively when the instructor did not abide by the practices they set forth for the class. For example, a student shared

[2] The quoted words and passages have been transcribed exactly as they appeared in the participants’ surveys; therefore, some quotes may contain errors in spelling and grammar.

the following example:

> I don't like when a professor says that it is so important for us to learn how to communicate properly in the class and fails to act on their own accord. I am taking…[a] class and the professor strongly told us to make sure we communicate with her, but when I have written on coursework comments or emails, she never replies. (Survey Participant #77)

Furthermore, students commented that some instructors were not available. In terms of describing availability, students expressed that instructors were not "available for answers to questions" (Survey Participant #82). One student remarked that instructors claim, "they are always able to be reached through Canvas but than the professor is hard to get in contact with" (Survey Participant #137). In other instances, students conveyed that a lack of access to F2F communication led them to feel that their instructor was unavailable (Survey Participant #139). In illustrating this point, Survey Participant # 26 commented that it is annoying when "an instructor appears to be available for questions but feels unreachable because they are not physically present."

Unhelpful responses. The final characteristic of unsatisfactory instructor responses is that the messages are not helpful. These six responses represented a small percentage of the total category. Students detailed unhelpful instructor responses as "…a generic response that is not helpful and does not address your actual concern" (Survey Participant #43), messages that "skip steps assuming we already know how to perform the task" (Survey Participant #92), or messages that include "a very brief, lazy answer that doesn't fully answer my question" (Survey Participant #129). Survey Participant #109 shared an experience with an instructor whose response to a question was

unhelpful:

> One of my instructors didn't have the ability to teach an online course. It seemed that she knew the material but didn't know how to project it to others. For instance, when asking for clarification on a question the response I received was to 'check out Wikipedia for the answer.' Though external links can be extremely beneficial, there were several instances where the professor was unable to explain what she meant so she tried to blame it on people not reading the links. The problem was in the question, not on how to get their.

Finally, one student summed up their annoyance with incomplete messages when they commented, "For all intents and purposes, an email is often the only way I can ask questions, and I would expect full answers if the class doesn't meet" (Survey Participant #7).

Frequency of Communication

The category with the second highest amount of comments was that of frequency of communication (*n* = 29). The comments in this category existed on a continuum, with two types of frequency emerging from the student responses: lack of communication and over-communication.

Lack of communication. There were 16 comments in regards to lack of communication, which accounted for over half of the responses in this category. In general, a lack of communication was characterized by instructors who send "irregular or non frequent email with too few details" (Survey Participant #45), have "very little communication with the class" (Survey Participant #42), or a course where there is a "break down of communication" (Survey Participant #137) between students and instructors. Students' comments indicated that they do not like infrequent (or the absence of) instructor communication. For

example, Survey Participant #37 explained it is "…annoying when instructors don't communicate with students…Or only communicate at a minimum." Similarly, Survey Participant #132 indicated, "I have never had a teacher communicate with me in an online course, they simply graded my work." Another student shared their ideas as to why instructors may not be communicating in online courses: "I've taken several courses where it's obvious that the instructor is overwhelmed with other tasks and their communication to students is the first thing to go" (Survey Participant #39). In each case, the dearth or nonexistence of instructor communication was viewed negatively.

In certain cases, students' comments provided a clear indication of why they perceived a lack of communication as a misbehavior. For instance, Survey Participant #121 expressed their dislike for instructors who are "less proactive to update/ remind students on what is up (lack communication)" and pointedly spelled out why the lack of communication can be detrimental: "this creates a less humanly connection/ interaction to the material that can promotes distraction to students." Likewise, Survey Participant #15 offered

> Something my teacher did that was annoying was not communicating enough with her students. She gave us the assignments and their brief descriptions of how to do them, and then let us roam free and complete them. I don't like this model, as I enjoy feeling like I am actually being educated by someone instead of a webpage.

Furthermore, students felt "like generally, the communication is lower, and has a negative impact on the learning" (Survey Participant #126) and pointed out that "its hard to do well when you don't know what is going on" (Survey Participant #86).

Over-communication. Even though the majority of students commented about the lack of instructor communication, 13 comments in this category addressed over-communication as a misbehavior. Students' comments delineated this type of communication as an instructor sending "too many messages" (Survey Participant #15), "over-messaging" (Survey Participant # 130), and sending "email every day" (Survey Participant #85). Excessive emails were described in two ways. First, participants described excessive emails in terms of the frequency they were sent, which was described as "an over bearing amount of emails" (Survey Participant #20) that are sent more than once per week (Survey Participant # 107). Second, excessive emails were described in terms of their extent and described as lengthy (Survey Participant #108). When explaining over-communication via email Survey Participant #122 shared,

> I had assignments that were due on Thursday nights at midnight and I had an instructor email me every Tuesday and say "Hey, I see you haven't done your assignment yet" when I had specifically allocated time to do it on Thursday. / (However, a weekly general reminder to all students is nice, but the personal messages were too much for me.)

The other type of over-communication comes in the form of "multiple announcement posts" (Survey Participant #20), "continuous announcements of reminders of every assignment that is due" (Survey Participant #74), and teachers who "constantly send out assignment reminders" (Survey Participant #33). Too much communication is viewed as a misbehavior because as Survey Participant #109 explained "…it becomes tedious to keep up with. I would much rather have a few announcements rather than 15-20 in a day to go through. It becomes too difficult to manage and keep the announcements straight."

Additionally, Survey Participant #136 expressed, “I don't like the communication behaviors like when instructor gives us to much information, and just ask us to read the long and disorganized paragraph to understand what to do.” In other words, students conveyed that an increased amount of communication does not necessarily communicate a message more clearly.

Unclear Expectations

The category with the third highest frequency of responses was unclear expectations (*n* = 28). Students explained that instructors did not provide clear expectations about assignments, exams, or the class in general.

The first focus of 23 students’ responses indicated that instructions were unclear on class assignments. Even though students acknowledged that assignment instructions were unclear, specific details about what made them unclear were absent from many of the responses. In such instances, students observed that instructors provided grading criteria that “didn’t totally make sense,” used “bad descriptions of assignments” (Survey Participant #87), did not “…explain what they are wanting” (Survey Participant #131), were imprecise with instructions (Survey Participant #100), and were “not clear enough on what they are looking for” (Survey Participant #119).

When describing unclear assignment instructions, student responses were in opposition at times. For example, student responses indicated that assignment instructions were vague about expectations and explanations (Survey Participant #80), which made assignments difficult to complete. In describing unclear instructions, Survey Participant #61 explained that they often

lack examples, which "…makes it hard to complete assignments, especially because you are not in the classroom. Assignments and instructions need to be as specific as possible and examples are always nice." Along these lines, Survey Participant #44 expressed that instructions "must be very clear and easy to follow," so as to avoid reaching out to the instructor and wasting "valuable time waiting for responses."

However, while some students noted that instructions should be straightforward and include plenty of details, other students conversely explained that verbose instructions could be construed as unclear. One student explained the difficulty with drawn-out instructions and claimed, "It can be hard to understand an assignment when the instructions are very lengthy" (Survey Participant #26). Because wordy instructions are viewed as unclear, Survey Participant #36 suggested that when there are "lots of itty bitty details…a rubric helps more than just a long email" to explicate an assignment clearly. Besides an obvious dislike for unclear instructions, 1 student aptly explained that it made them feel "unsure of exactly what is expected of you as a student" (Survey Participant # 44).

Second, two students mentioned course syllabi in their comments about unclear expectations. One student wrote that instructors did not explain their course syllabi (Survey Participant #82) and another stated, "I also find it annoying when professors are not clear in their syllabuses about expectations" (Survey Participant #5). An additional 2 students' comments in this category were in regards to class exams. Students commented about not knowing what kind of

information they needed to know for exams (Survey Participant #41). Another response demonstrated confusion about what resources they could use on exams (e.g., calculators, workbooks) and expressed that at times, instructors do not share their expectations with students and/or exam proctors.

Finally, 1 student commented in the unclear expectations category that they "found it annoying that instructors fail to communicate the core messages to be leaned in a given module" (Survey Participant #37). In other words, this particular student perceived the instructor's lack of communication about objectives for a module/learning unit as not being clear about the expectations and thus, a misbehavior.

Teaching Methods

Students identified several ways that an instructor can misbehave through their (mis)use of various teaching techniques (*n* = 12). Teaching methods were considered in four different ways. First, 5 students' comments concerning this category addressed instructors' use of videos and video lectures. Survey Participant #12 explained, "I found it really annoying having to sit through two hour long lectures a week watching it on my computer. If I wanted to have a lecture I would have signed up to take the class that isn't online." Similarly, Survey Participant #24 shared,

> I hate when the only way to get a lecture is to sit and listen to a lesson or watch someone talk about the lesson. If I wanted to do that I would have taken an in class course. I think that lessons should be in a written form or a powerpoint also. It is extremely difficult to listen to history lesson online with no notes or anything to also look at.

Additionally, students stated, “online lectures are hard to keep up on when there is also assigned reading and heavy coursework” (Survey Participant #40). On the other hand, students considered it a misbehavior when an instructor did not “upload videos of some sort to either teach the material, or to at least outline the week’s work” (Survey Participant #73). Finally, 1 student explicated that videos did not annoy them, but

> I really didn’t like when a teacher taught a course WITHOUT actually using any of their own videos. I had one teacher a couple of years ago that put up informational videos as "lectures" without actually teaching anything. When a professor put in enough time to make their own instructional videos, it really shows in the quality of the course. I didn't take much from that course because I didn't feel like I made a personal connection with the professor (I never even knew what he looked like!). Even though there isn't any personable experiences in an auditorium setting anyway, an online course should be able to bridge the gap between professor and student (the irony of internet and social media these days!).

In all cases, the students’ comments showed signs that they considered the use of videos and/or video lectures as a misbehavior because they didn’t feel they were appropriate for online courses (but are for F2F classes), created additional work, or were impersonal if not created by the instructor themselves.

Second, (in)consideration to a student’s learning style was also mentioned in three student comments in regards to this category. For example, Survey Participant #113 commented that they disliked “video or audio instructions. It is easier to grasp when I am reading the material.” In a related response, Survey Participant #63 commented about how an instructor’s teaching methods can affect their learning by stating, “Online learning only provides for one learning type (most of the time) and if the teacher teaches a way that does not positively

correspond to your learning type, doing well in the class becomes difficult." Moreover, Survey Participant #144 shared:

> I had one class where the instructor posted long articles for us to read, then would post a quiz based on that article. These article where lengthy and included a lot of information about theories and such. I felt like I didn't learn very much this way and would have liked to have a supplemental powerpoint presentation or some other material explaining these theories.

In other words, when an instructor's teaching method did not align with how a student perceived they learned best, their instructor's actions were considered a misbehavior.

The other four comments in this category concerned two other teaching methods in online courses: group work and the use of recorded slideshows. In regards to group work, students did not like "when instructors structure online content into group work" (Survey Participant #46) and deemed it a misbehavior when they were "encouraged to work in groups but turn in individual thoughts and answers" (Survey Participant #12). The utilization of recorded slideshows was the final misbehavior identified in this category. Survey Participant #57 pointed out, "I really dislike having a recording slideshow as the primary course content. It is generally very difficult for me to engage with the material regardless of how interested I am," and in a similar vein Survey Participant #103 remarked, "Recorded slideshows are pretty uninteresting and make it difficult for me to engage fully with the material." Accordingly, an instructor (mis)use of various teaching methods (e.g., the use of group work, unengaging videos or slideshows, and lack of consideration to a student's learning style) are considered a misbehavior.

Inadequate Feedback

The next category of instructor misbehavior consisted of a group of student comments about instructors' feedback, which collectively can be described as inadequate (*n* = 11). Students characterized such feedback in two main ways: feedback that was lacking in some manner and feedback that was too general.

Lacking feedback. Seven comments in this category represented the greater part of the comments in the inadequate feedback category. Given the comments, it can be reasoned that a lack of feedback means that instructors do not give feedback with the grades they post (Survey Participant #54), were not "very clear with the feedback on assignments" (Survey Participant #120), or failed "to provide meaningful feedback" (Survey Participant #112). One student expressed taking exception to instructor comments that lacked "…ample feedback for written assignments" expressing that they experienced an instructor who used "online grammar graders…instead of providing useful, intellectual feedback" (Survey Participant #111). Furthermore, Survey Participant #95 suggested that a lack of feedback made them "…feel like [instructors] are not giving much effort on helping students improve."

General feedback. A smaller, but equally important group of comments in this category came from 4 student respondents. Feedback that is considered too general lacks detail and fails to help a student understand his or her grade (Survey Participant #11). One student aptly explained why precise feedback is important:

> It was stressful when I would submit my answers and only get a grade as a response or when it shows which problems I got wrong but doesn't explain why or show the worked out step by step process so I can evaluate where my error occurred. (Survey Participant #31)

Additionally, instructors who provide nonspecific feedback do not include personalized comments. As an example, Survey Participant #39 explained an experience in which the instructor wrote "a blanket statement to everyone" and noted, "nothing in my feedback from the instructor was individualized." Finally, Survey Participant #27 also explained that impersonal feedback "did not address [her] as an individual," which left them feeling "very disconnected" (Survey Participant #27) in their online course.

Unorganized Course

Another category that emerged from students' responses was the unorganized course material provided on LMS/Canvas (*n* = 11). The comments in this category relate to ideas of the lack of organization in Canvas courses and the information overload that is experienced in online courses.

Eight of the students' comments in this category concerned how instructors organize their courses. For example, students said, "instructors don't organize the course well" (Survey Participant # 37), "the organization of some classes gets pretty annoying" (Survey Participant #129), and the "instructor did not organize the course using canvas tabs (assignments, grades, files etc)" (Survey Participant #67). Other students described why the lack of organization is considered a misbehavior and offered, "Oftentimes instructors don't put the proper things in the proper folders on canvas which can make it extremely hard

to find assignments and study materials" (Survey Participant #64). In a like manner, Survey Participant #56 shared, "I'm in a class now that has links to a million different Canvas pages and you have to go to all of them in order to get the information." Moreover, Survey Participant #96 observed,

> The only element of an online class that I've found annoying is how numerous the different modules, readings, files, etc. that seemingly could have been consolidated. In my online class this semester there are a varying number of readings and lectures we have to review each week, and you have to hunt around to find them rather than all of them being in one place.

Thus, students view a lack of organization as a misbehavior because it complicates accessing important information (Survey Participant #37) that could have been organized using the existing LMS/Canvas functions (e.g., Menu, Folders, etc.).

The other three comments in this category considered the amount of information that is presented in the LMS/Canvas. Descriptions in this category included details about how instructors "[put] an excessive amount of information on the modules for the coursework…that makes the week's tasks seem daunting" (Survey Participant #67) and "can't filter what is interesting, useful information for the course, from just overloading of online materials because it is so easy to access links, videos, newspaper articles, journal articles, chapter texts, blogs, etc." (Survey Participant #37). Sometimes, the overload of information is automatically generated notifications from the LMS/Canvas that sends "emails about the weeks work and its actually referring to stuff that is due at a later date and it confuses me for a minute" (Survey Participant #70). The LMS/Canvas offers an abundance of places (and ways) for instructors to post

information for their online courses and this category makes it clear that those who post too much or do not organize their materials are committing a misbehavior.

Busy Work and Unreasonable Assignment Requirements

Emerging from student comments was a category about busy work and unreasonable assignment requirements (*n* = 10). Six students' remarks were in regard to the type of task(s) that their instructors assigned. A general sentiment expressed by students about online courses was that, "A lot of online courses seem to be just busy work" (Survey Participant #80). Comments also suggested the assignment of busy work as an instructor misbehavior because it was described as "pointless" (Survey Participant #87) or considered tedious hoops to jump through (Survey Participant #49). Regarding an assignment that required replying to classmates' discussion posts, Survey Participant #117 explained,

> I cannot stand Busy work! When I am assigned to do three discussions and have so many required posts it is very irritating because I feel like I'm obligated to do so for a good grade instead of being able to focus on the subject and what I should be learning.

Additionally, Survey Participant #134 offered,

> I didn't like pointless activities. Getting to know you section isn't all that important if in your class you won't be working in groups, if it is more of a group online project than I understand why they would need that.

Here, the pointless activity (i.e., icebreaker activity) was viewed as a misbehavior because the student did not see a value in getting to know their classmates where student-student interaction was not required or necessary. Although most students disliked the assigning of busy work, one student responded that an

“annoying behavior was ‘making assignments that are too subjective’” (Survey Participant #10).

The remaining four comments in this category described assignments as having an unreasonable requirement. One comment alluded to the “amount of time that one assignment can take” (Survey Participant #78). Related to the time it takes to complete an assignment, two student responses explained that their instructors did “not [allow] enough time to complete certain projects” (Survey Participant #54) or provided an “insufficient amount of time to turn in assignments” (Survey Participant #108), although what is considered ‘enough time’ was not delineated in these responses. Survey Participant #79 commented in regards to unreasonable requirements:

> I do not enjoy the fact that responses have to be a certain length. I understand there has to be some standard to which we can be held accountable in participating online, but I don’t like the length requirement. I think there can be a better standard.

In this case, the word/page requirement may be viewed as an arbitrary assignment requirement and therefore viewed as a misbehavior.

Neglectful Conduct

A collection of student comments surrounded neglectful instructor conduct (*n* = 10). Students described neglectful conduct as “inconsistent” (Survey Participant #66), lacking follow through (Survey Participant #142), and unhelpful (Survey Participant #11).

Three comments in this category referenced instructors who were inconsistent. Specifically, 1 student commented in regards to inconsistent grading. Survey Participant #69 noted that they received “repeated comments

on each assignment but the score varies from paper to paper." A different student expressed,

> It is frustrating when course material [was] not consistent throughout the Canvas LMS. For instance, in one of my classes, I had to pull up the syllabus to find the articles I was suppose to read each week, then I had to go to the modules and assignments to find out what each assignment expectation was and what the due date was for each assignment. (Survey Participant #89)

Although this comment seemed incomplete (it lacks a contrasting example of how Canvas is used in other online classes), it does offer a glimpse of the annoyance students may feel about the varying ways that instructors use Canvas to organize their online course.

Several responses in this category concerned instructors who lack follow through. Students considered this as a misbehavior because the instructor did not complete the task they claimed they would do. For example, Survey Participant #142 commented that instructors say "that they will contact you about your assignments but don't;" in other words, "not following through on what they say they will do." Another student explained, "I don't like when professors say they will upload a lecture/assignment on a certain [date], but then end up not doing that" (Survey Participant #5).

The final aspect of neglectful behavior represents 4 students' comments about instructors who were unhelpful, impatient, or demonstrated a lack of care, which accounted for four of the comments in this category. In terms of unhelpfulness, a student remarked that an instructor misbehaved when they didn't "help me on a question for an assignment" (Survey Participant #11) and another commented about instructors who are unwilling to work with students

"when students thought they deserved a higher grade, but their emails about that got lost in the mail or something…" (Survey Participant #10). In another account, a student stated, they do not like "When instructors lose patients with me because I may not understand something the way it is written or explained…" (Survey Participant #124). Finally, Survey Participant #143 indicated that an instructor's misbehavior stems from a lack of care and "…no heart. What happened to caring for others as you would want others to care for you?"

Inconsistent or Conflicting Due Dates

Students' considered inconsistent or conflicting due dates as an instructor misbehavior (*n* = 10). Students detailed their dislike when instructors did not have "a handle on the due dates…for assignments" (Survey Participant #97) or had "different deadlines for the same assignment posted in different spots [on Canvas]" (Survey Participant #91). Eight of the comments in this category addressed conflicting due dates as a misbehavior because the mistakes led to confusion and frustration (Survey Participant #61). Two students commented about conflicting due dates being a result of an instructor copying their Canvas course from a previous semester. Survey Participant #31 explained, "when the online material is just copied from the previous semester…due dates are wrong…" and similarly Survey Participant #44 noted that sometimes "the teacher just rolled over their class schedule from the previous semester and so the calendar says when things are due, when the syllabus has different dates." In describing inconsistent due dates, Survey Participant #89 shared that it was annoying

> …when the syllabus states "please post one discussion per article and two responses for article by Sunday at midnight". Then in the assignment or discussion itself it says the same thing only states that the posts have to be done by Thursday and the responses are due by Sunday at midnight. Keep it consistent and the same everywhere.

Conflicting information about due dates is perceived negatively because it can lead to the instructor having to clarify and notify "the entire class of their mistake" (Survey Participant #20) or potentially cause the assignment to be submitted at the incorrect time because an instructor "has not done their job" (Survey Participant #135).

In a related comment, a student identified changing due dates and times as a misbehavior too. For example, "One week it is [due] Sunday at 11:59 PM, the next week it might be Monday at 11:50 AM" (Survey Participant #12). Furthermore, Survey Participant #24 conveyed their dislike for "assignment deadlines [that] are at an awkward time," although the student did not qualify what was deemed as "awkward" in the response.

Returns Work Late

Another instructor misbehavior category that emerged from student responses was that instructors return work late (*n* = 8). Students commented about their instructors "taking forever to respond or grade assignments" (Survey Participant #133), being "late on feedback" (Survey Participant #142), "not updating grades regularly" (Survey Participant #45), and not grading assignments quickly (Survey Participant #140 & Survey Participant #145). One reason that students view this instructor behavior as problematic is because it

makes it difficult to "…know when you're on track or to stay on track when there are long periods of time between instructor feedback" (Survey Participant #41).

When commenting on returning work late, 2 students commented on the timeliness of feedback. One student stated, "I find it annoying when instructors fail to grade assignments in a timely manner" (Survey Participant #112). In another student account, Survey Participant #99 explained

> "[One] of the main problems I have had with online professors is the timeliness of assignments being graded. Since there isn't face to face communication available, it's hard to know if there is anything wrong with an assignment you've submitted because it hasn't been graded in a timely manner…"

Although Survey Participant #99 revealed that an instructor had taken nearly 1 month to return an assignment, in general, students' comments did not clearly include a definition of timely grading and the amount of time that they deemed acceptable in terms of returning work (e.g., 1 week, 10 days, etc.).

Lack of Technical Expertise or Knowledge

A cluster of students' comments surrounded the category of lack of technical expertise or knowledge (*n* = 6). Students described this as experiencing technical difficulties (Survey Participant #9) when working from various platforms, dealing with broken links, and/or having an instructor who cannot handle technical problems. Two students' comments dealt with instructors whose "instructions don't totally match how I have to do [an assignment] on my computer" (Survey Participant #70). Similarly, Survey Participant #92 explained, "…I have found that when an instructor is showing you how to do something they might not have the exact same software that needs to be used to do the

assignment." In other words, working from different platforms (e.g., Mac or PC), may cause issues with a students' understanding of how to complete an assignment. Additionally, 2 students commented that they disliked "when professors post links that don't work" (Survey Participant #35) or encounter "inactive instruction webpages" (Survey #108). Examples such as this are likely considered an instructor misbehavior because in online classes, all material(s) are posted on the LMS/Canvas; thus, broken links can prevent a student from accessing the course material. Finally, 1 student shared that instructors "sometimes seem ill-equipped to deal with technical problems that so frequently arise" (Survey Participant #3). It is conceivable that an instructor's lack of technical knowledge is considered a misbehavior by students because technology is so central to online learning.

Unreasonable Course Requirements

Another category that emerged from students' comments was unreasonable course requirements (*n* = 6). Two of the comments in this category were concerned with exams in online courses that were proctored. One student explained their frustration with the process of proctored exams, as it seemed in contradiction to the term "online course." Survey Participant #54 explained, "The point to taking online courses is for the flexibility and being able to be anywhere in the world and still complete your assignments. However, if you're overseas it's not as easy to find an English speaking proctor." Additionally, Survey Participant #83 described the proctored exam experience as "[containing] way too much material for total completion in a computer lab!!! So

frustrating."

Three student responses also indicated several other requirements that were deemed unreasonable. One unreasonable requirement is that online instructors "expect that you will be checking the class website everyday" (Survey Participant #59). Specifically, this student described this as unfair because

> I do not have the time to get online and check each class every day, thus sometimes miss opportunities or assignments that are only available for a single day but I can only check the class website for example 1-2 times per week.

In a similar vein, Survey Participant #6 expressed dislike for requirements such as having "something [due] everyday because an online course is supposed to be convenient." This same participant explained "I don't have things due everyday in a regular lecture course," which provides an explanation as to why they consider this is requirement as unfair. Another student shared that a misbehavior occurs "…when online instructors don't respect school holidays" and explained that instructors "…schedule assignments due over spring break etc. because [class] is online" (Survey Participant #74). As a final example of unreasonable course requirements, 1 student expressed that instructors do not consider students' means. In this particular case, an instructor required students to visit a museum, but did not consider those who did "not have a transportation" to make such trips (Survey Participant #117).

Messaging Platforms

A group of three student responses (*n* = 3) centered on the messaging platforms used by their instructors in online courses. A student described their

instructor's mixed use of messaging platforms (e.g., email and Canvas messages) and explained, "…it would be smoother if the communication remained consistent throughout so I am not confused or lost when a new assignment pops up on one of the mediums that I did not check" (Survey Participant #2). The other two comments were about students' vexation with instructors who only communicated via one messaging platform. In some cases, an instructor will ask that student questions are posted in public places on Canvas, such as Announcements "because they believe that you're question is likely shared with other students" (Survey Participant #46); however, as this student described, this was generally an annoyance. Finally, 1 student voiced their dislike for Canvas' internal messaging system and explained

> No one uses these things and having to go in and check these daily is just a very bad way to communicate with students. Announcements or using a students real email address @yahoo.com or @gmail.com is a much more functional way to reach students. Forcing people to use a very un-user friendly system just to utilize is miserable especially if looses you pts in a class. (Survey Participant #58)

In sum, an instructor's use of messaging platforms other than email was viewed as a misbehavior because of the potential for confusion, missed announcements, and the additional task of logging in to see messages via the Canvas messaging system.

Lack of Flexibility

Another category emerged from a group of comments about instructors' unwillingness to extend deadlines or release all course content from the onset of a course (*n* = 3). Survey Participant #13 expressed "I find it annoying when they

do not extend deadlines." Two other students' comments concerned ways that instructors release or control course content/assignments. Survey Participant #46 explained, "It annoys me when instructors choose not to release all of the course content at the beginning of the course, thus allowing greater flexibility." In a similar accord, Survey Participant #47 commented, "I also don't like having assignments locked until a certain date. I want to do things on my own time," alluding to his or her opinion that course assignments should be released all at once, rather than scaffolded throughout the course.

Unprofessional Communication

The final category of instructor misbehaviors was identified as unprofessional communication (*n* = 2). One student expressed their annoyance with instructors who "try to be too 'pal-ish' in announcements" (Survey Participant #37). In addition, insulting or disparaging instructor comments emerged from a student's response. For example, Survey Participant #67 recalled

> The worst statement I have heard was " I WANT YOU TO THINK" related to a humanities assignment. This was the instructors way of assuming we were going to submit sub-par work. Most instructors wouldn't say that to a class sitting in front of them.

Instructors are expected to behave in professional ways and students deem overly casual or insulting communication as unprofessional resulting in a misbehavior.

Outliers

Fourteen student comments were not classifiable. That is, the response did not fit a category, did not align with other comments, and/or did not offer

enough elaboration or exploration of an action that could be categorized as a misbehavior. Comments in the outliers included remarks such as, “i don’t like when one teacher is different in different classes they teach” (Survey Participant #28), “I find the most annoying thing that my instructor would do was change all my scores continuously” (Survey Participant #76), “Less interaction between the students and teachers” (Survey Participant #69), “Another one is sometimes they’ll say teach something but there is an easier solution but because they’re stubborn they want you to do it their way (Survey Participant #72), and “I do not like when they act stricter than the in class instructors because ‘online classes are going to be tough’” (Survey Participant #1). Although a part of the data set for this research, outlying comments were not considered in the emerging categories presented above.

Summary

In summary, new student incivility and instructor misbehavior categories emerged from participants’ responses concerning online learning environments. In regard to student incivilities, nine categories emerged from the instructors’ responses, four of which demonstrated overlap with categories from literature (see Chapter Six for an extended discussion). Sixteen categories concerning instructor misbehaviors emerged from student responses, and four of the categories displayed commonalities with categories from literature. In addition to the categories that emerged, both types of respondents reported on important concepts such as time (i.e., what constitutes an appropriate use of time) and conceptions of (un)professional communication. Chapter Six details the ways

F2F and online incivility/misbehavior categories overlay and the implications of these categories in the online classroom. The next chapter will examine what instructors and students report as contributing factors to conflict they have experienced in online courses.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS, PART TWO

As previously mentioned, classroom conflict literature suggests that instructor/student conflict is often precipitated by incivilities or misbehaviors (e.g., Berger, 2000; Meyers, 2003). Thus, the second research question in this study explored:

> What are the contributing factors that lead to conflict between instructors and students in online courses?

In Chapter Four, the student incivility and instructor misbehavior categories that emerged from participants' responses were presented. In this chapter, I describe the contributing factors of conflict that emerged from a content analysis of online students' and instructors' survey responses. Within each category of contributing factors to conflict, I also align each category with the student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors explicated in Chapter Four.

Contributing Factors to Conflict with Online Students

In a question concerning conflicts, instructors reported their perceptions of what led to an experienced instructor/student conflict. Although 51 instructors participated in the online survey, 5 did not respond to the question about conflict, 7 reported that they had not experienced conflict, and 2 responses did not

provide enough information or relevant information and therefore were not considered in my analysis. In total, 10 categories of conflict emerged from the data from the online survey, each of which is described in turn (see Table 5.1).

Invalid Excuses and Appeals for Accommodations

Invalid student excuses and appeals for course accommodations were identified as a contributing factor to conflict (*n* = 8). Although this category may appear as two distinct categories, they are inextricably linked because excuses and appealing for accommodations often go hand-in-hand; consequently, this category broaches both of these conceptions.

Table 5.1: Instructor-Reported Conflicts and Frequencies

Category of Conflict	Frequency/ Percentage
Invalid Excuses and Appeals for Accommodations	8; 21.62%
Does Not Follow Instructions	6; 16.22%
Complaints About Grade or Assignment	6; 16.22%
Academic Dishonesty	4; 10.81%
Complaints About the Course	4; 10.81%
Offensive Student Behaviors	3; 8.11%
Issues With Technology	2 5.41%
Confusion About Assignment	2; 5.41%
Accusations of Bullying	1; 2.70%
Casual Email	1; 2.70%

In all instances in this category, students did not provide a valid excuse to their instructor (e.g., medically related, university sanctioned; Survey Participant #33), particularly for presenting excuses in regards to exams. Survey Participant #14 recalled an experience where a student's excuse for missing an exam was "for no reason other than he wasn't on top of the course enough to know about it." Likewise, Survey Participant #30 experienced excuses as a contributing factor to conflict and shared

> The biggest conflict I've encountered with an online student had to do with scheduling an exam. My exams for online courses are taken via Canvas, but I require that students register and take the exam in-person at an approved proctor site.…on Thursday night of exam week and say that she was out-of-area and didn't know how to register for the exam…There were numerous back-and-forth emails, with total incredulity on her part that I wasn't going to allow her to take the exam late... I ended up feeling unnecessarily mean but also frustrated that I was expected to bend when a student was not meeting me in the middle.

Additionally, a student's excuse was conveyed in an email that stated, "…he would be on a plane and would therefore not be able to turn his assignment in on time because he would not have internet access" (Survey Participant #41).

In two separate instances, instructors shared experiences of conflict in which the contributing factor was a student being dropped from the course by the registrar. Survey Participant #53 recalled receiving an email from the university registrar that a student was dropped from a course, but then

> …received panicked, irrational, illiterate emails from the students saying to open the quizzes (that I didn't know s/he was taking) even thought the U says no (had misunderstood the grade weight of quizzes) and begged me to make exceptions to all my policies and to my schedule because s/he's from Iraq and had been afraid ISIS had (turns out) his family.

In a similar fashion, Survey Participant #51 recalled that a student asked for an

"…extension on an assignment claiming to have been de-registered by the Registrar before it was due and only reinstated after the assignment was overdue." However, upon checking the course access report, the instructor was able to "…see that not only had she skipped large portions of the required activities in the course modules, but she had indeed accessed the assignment multiple times before it was due."

Two instructors experienced conflicts with students who presented vacation as their excuse for wanting an extension or exception in the course. In one case, an instructor recalled "…a student who emailed me during the first week announcing that he will be taking an extended vacation during the semester and ask[ed] for multiple schedule accommodations" (Survey Participant #25). Likewise, Survey Participant #1 explained they had a student

> who contacted me to say he had booked a family vacation in the middle of the semester, and would miss a week of online class, and therefore miss assignments due that week. He wanted me to post materials over a month in advance, but I was not willing to do so, as it would make assignments available out of chronological order for the rest of the class, and would not allow materials to be adapted to the pace and skill level of students closer to the assigned weeks. It is also not the responsibility of an instructor to accommodate non-emergency and non-university events.

In sum, instructors reported that a contributing factor to conflict was their students' expectations for exceptions to the course and university policies without the presentation of a valid excuse that warrant such accommodations.

This contributing factor category aligns with two student incivilities identified by instructors, *Offers Excuses* and *Requests Accommodations*. As formerly explained, these two categories are associated because they are so

often presented in tandem. In seven of the eight experiences that instructors shared, when students presented an excuse, it was used to frame a request for accommodation(s).

Does Not Follow Instructions

Instructors reported that conflict surfaced in their online courses due to students' not following directions (*n* = 6). Two instructors specified incidents of conflict with students who submitted their assignments in the incorrect format. Survey Participant # 2 recalled an instance where a student turned in their final assignment

> …in an incompatible format. I asked this student to fix this but the student just resubmitted the same incompatible file contending that it was complete. I used special software to open the assignment and it was nothing more than a copy of the assignment guidelines that I posted on Canvas.

In another instance, Survey Participant #49 explained "For the first assignment many students turned there assignment in the incorrect format" and went on to comment, "I chose to accept these assignments for the first one, but did not allow any other formats for the second one."

In two instances in this category, instructors shared their experiences about conflict with students stemming from unprofessional postings in which guidelines were included in the course syllabus (Survey Participant #11) or arising from "a student who just wouldn't follow directions in terms of how to complete and submit an assignment" (Survey Participant #21).

The final two instructor responses concerned conflicts that arose from students not following directions that were included in content posted

on the LMS/Canvas. One instructor remarked

> The following is dialog that I have with at least 2-3 students every week. / / STUDENT: I did everything right on this assignment, and the grader marked me wrong, can you change my assignment? / / ME: Did you watch the instructional videos, read any of the learning content, or watch the video that walks you through the assignment? (At this point I have already looked at the analytics, and 95% of the time they have not done any of the homework) / The reason why you got it wrong is because you didn't follow the instructions. (Survey Participant #20)

Survey Participant #6 explained that they posted a voice-threaded slideshow for the class and instructed their students to listen to the lecture in order to receive "…the assignment for the week at the end of the presentation. Several students obviously did not bother to listen to the presentation, because the lecture introduced a new essay format…[and] these students used the old format by mistake."

This category partially maps onto the broader student incivility category, *Does Not Read Course Materials*. However, a student not following instructions is an inherent part of the aforementioned incivility. As mentioned previously, instructors observed that not reading course content is evidenced in the way(s) that students complete assignments incorrectly.

Complaints About Grade or Assignment

A category emerged from instructors' experiences with conflict that originated from students who were upset with a grade or course assignment (*n* = 6). Three of the six comments in this category broached the topic of students' grades. For example, Survey Participant #46 recalled an experience where a student "did not like the grade given for a group project and sent me an

extremely aggressive email asserting…I should know better than to give [the student] a poor grade because [the student] is known to be smarter than that." In a like manner, an instructor explained a conflict that arose from a student who took "their unhappiness with a grade to a program director before they spoke with me" (Survey Participant #13). Survey Participant #40 also encountered a student who was upset with their grade but communicated the issue to the TA of the course and "was borderline (or perhaps just over the border) insulting to my TA because of a grade he received on an exam."

The other three instructor comments in this category stem from student comments that instructors received in regard to a grade being unfair. In two instances, the instructor was accused of including trick questions on their exam. Survey Participant #3 recalled

> The conflict that stands out the most was the one where a student posted on the quiz s/he took "Really? Trick questions don't help anyone." This was not in an email, as I request in the syllabus and elsewhere, but on the quiz comments bar.

In the same vein, an instructor recollected an experience where a student

> …didn't agree with the grading of my quizzes. He felt that some of the questions were misleading. The questions he picked out were ones I had written in order to see if students had paid attention to some of the finer details of the posted lecture. The student wanted to argue that there were technicalities that made the right answer wrong and vice versa. (Survey Participant #34)

The final example in this category illustrated a conflict that surfaced when a student felt an assignment was unfair "because the answers were not in the assigned reading material and the methodology to obtain the answers was not explained" (Survey Participant #18).

This category aligns with the student incivility concerning *Complaints*. Specifically, there is overlap with this student incivility because of the protests concerning student grades and explicit criticism about the course assignments/exams.

Academic Dishonesty

One type of conflict that was reported by instructors surrounded the topic of academic dishonesty (*n* = 4). In two of the instances in this category, instructors made direct mentions of plagiarism (Survey Participant #12). One instructor provided specifics about their encounter with student plagiarism:

> A students plagiarized 2 assignments in the course. It was a complicated situation because the student was an international student and the student was taking the course for credit at another US university. (Survey Participant #37)

In other cases, instructors hinted at academic dishonesty by commenting that students may be colluding or getting "help from other students when they take exams" (Survey Participant #7). Similarly, Survey Participant #36 shared an experience with a student who was not outwardly cheating, but had finagled around the LMS/Canvas system in order to achieve perfect scores on assignments:

> A recent interaction was a comment I had provided as feedback on an assignment expressing my concerns that a student had received all zeros on a first attempt at a set of labs in order to see the specific directions at the end of the labs, and then went back to complete the labs in order to get the 100%. My initial comments did not use the word "cheating", but instead indicated my concern for the appearance of all the initial zeros, and that I would not be able to continue to give their grade based on the highest lab scores if they did not make an effort to complete the labs on their own in their first attempt.

In each of these cases, the University's Student Academic Code of Conduct frames the behaviors that instructors dealt with in their online course. Specifically, the code explicates that students are to refrain "from cheating, plagiarizing, …misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating" (Student Academic Conduct, Section V, A). As a consequence, instructors view academic dishonesty as an event that may precipitate conflict with students. It is also directly aligned with the student incivility category of *Acts of Dishonesty*, which encompasses students who plagiarize work or are unscrupulous about how they access information in an online course.

Complaints About the Course

Instructor responses also concerned student complaints about the course (e.g., workload, structure, content; $n = 4$). In the first two examples, instructors' comments suggested that the course workload was a contributing factor to conflict with students. Survey Participant #26 shared:

> This semester I have a student and she posted a response to an announcement that expressed, to all students, her distress about the amount of work/expectations for work of our course (it is a 2000 level course). The student's post was in response to an announcement I posted that included a 3-page file outlining how students could be successful in their written assignments… Following this announcement post from me a student posted a long response post (to all students) about how overwhelming the work load of my course is, how unreasonable I am in my expectations, how I am asking more work in my course than all of her other 3 classes the student is taking this semester, etc. etc. It was a very long post of about 3 large paragraphs.

Similarly, Survey Participant #9 experienced conflict in regards to workload and expressed

> Every semester, a student is unprepared for the amount of work involved in an online class. They will often email about how it is unfair, impossible, or not worth the number of credit hours. Very often, some students will not complete the required homework before the class is scheduled to end, and email me in a panic.

Interestingly, in these two experiences, the students did not communicate their protest to the instructor, but instead pleaded their case to fellow classmates in the course and/or an administrator.

In the third example in this category, the course organization was the contributing factor to conflict, as a student “was VERY upset about the structure of the course and the technical problems. However, instead of contacting me directly, he went to my department chair to complain” (Survey Participant #27). The fourth example of a student complaint factoring into a conflict came from Survey Participant #8 who commented,

> One low-scale "conflict" I've had was with a non-traditional student who upon viewing the study guide emailed me telling me this content was a waste of time and had nothing to do with the skills we were developing all semester.

Although this specific category focuses on conflict that was triggered by student complaints about the course, it does map onto the over-arching student incivility category of *Complaints*. As previously discussed, one aspect of student complaints is that they may be in regards to the amount of work required in an online course (which from a student perspective is seen as excessive) and such complaints are sometimes communicated publicly via Discussion Boards or taken directly to a third party above the instructor’s rank (e.g., program director).

Offensive Student Behavior

Instructors' comments cited offensive student behavior as a contributing factor that led to conflict (*n* = 3). In two instances of offensive behaviors, students' language choice was of concern. One instructor experienced a student using the term "colored people" in a writing assignment (Survey Participant #22). Another instructor mentioned an occurrence where student's language in a paper was sexist and "very male-centric and controlling about women's behavior" (Survey Participant #23). Though the first two instances were behaviors that manifested in student's papers and discussion board posts, Survey Participant #32 explained that conflict occurs in public parts of the online course, such as the discussion board, where a "student posted a very long discussion post that was very directed to another individual, and could be misconstrued as hurtful."

The first two examples in this category of contributing factors to conflict are not affiliated with a student incivility. However, the example about a students' offensive discussion post does align with the incivility that addresses students *Writing Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts*, which are offensive in nature.

Issues with Technology

Instructors reported conflict with students who experienced technology failure or frustration (*n* = 2). Survey Participant #17 revealed "The most typical reasons for a student becoming upset is due to technology failures, such as a file failing to download, or a website failing to open;" the instructor also commented that students then "write me in a panic or upset tone." Survey Participant #10 received a letter from a dissatisfied student:

> …who was frustrated with the technology. This was a non-traditional student and the basic computer issues with the course were very frustrating to them. They would email me regularly, and if I didn't email back within literally minutes to an hour, they would re-email with more frustration. They then would call the TACC services and then got very frustrated with them, as they as well could not resolve the many issues satisfactorily. Partly, this was due to the fact that this student was not comfortable with computers.

Even though different instructors provided these accounts, it is interesting to note technology incidents were both followed by panicked and irritated student emails. This particular category of conflict aligns slightly with the student incivility, *Offers Excuses*; the difference is that as an incivility, instructors noted that students blame technology for late assignments. However, in regards to conflict, the conflict narratives appear to stem more from students' frustration with technology.

Confusion About Assignments

Student confusion about assignments was reported as a contributing factor to conflict in 2 instructor's experiences (*n* = 2). For example, 1 instructor recalled, "I had one student who was rather confused about an assignment. This student sent several emails seeking clarification…After approximately a week of exchanging information with this student she submitted an assignment that did not fully meet the requirements" (Survey Participant #5). In a similar experience, Survey Participant #16 expressed that a conflict emerged from a student's confusion about an assignment deadline. The instructor recollected a student who

> …was upset because Canvas said they had until Sunday to submit their assignment (all assignments are due by 11:59 PM Saturday night in this class). I had set up Canvas to allow a 5 minute late submission to allow for slow internet, etc. But, the student

> interpreted it as meaning it was due Sunday night.

This category did not align with any of the student incivilities that instructors identified in F2F delivery modes.

Accusations of Bullying

In one instance, an instructor reported that conflict with a student arose from the students' accusation of bullying (*n* = 1). Survey Participant #28 recalled

> A student accused me of bullying and using my power to slant the discussion when we disagreed about the importance of vaccinations. When I pointed out the lack of credibility of the sources he was using to support his argument, and requested that the group move on to other areas of discussion, he became quite vocal.

Although the instructor explained that the student became vocal, there was not a clarification about where this particular transaction transpired (i.e., Discussion Board, via email). This category did not map onto any student incivilities that were identified by instructors.

Casual Email

A single instructor reported experiencing conflict with a student due to overly casual emails (*n* = 1). For example, Survey Participant #29 shared the following:

> I had a student who started every email with "Hey". / Each reply back to him from me started with, "Dear Mr. Smith", thereby modeling the correct salutation I desired. / We went back and forth like this for about 6 emails, him with "Hey" and me with "Dear Mr. Smith". (Survey Participant #29)

This category, albeit representative of a small part of the sample, aligns with one type of *Unprofessional Communication* identified as a student incivility, overly

informal communication, in which student emails do not address the instructor with the appropriate title and/or lack a name.

Contributing Factors to Conflict with Online Instructors

When asked to share conflict experiences, students reported their insights about what contributing factors precipitated instructor/student conflict. Although 137 students participated in the online survey, 10 did not respond to the question about conflict, 33 reported that they had not experienced conflict, and eight responses did not provide enough information or relevant information and therefore were not considered in my analysis. In total, 11 categories of conflict emerged from the remaining 86 conflict narratives data the online survey produced, each of which is described in turn in Table 5.2.

Technical Issues

A category of conflicts emerged from student accounts concerning technical issues they experienced in their online course (*n* = 17). A major theme materialized from nine student comments, which shared that they experienced trouble turning in assignment submissions on the LMS/Canvas (Survey Participant #130). In several cases, students recalled they were unable to submit assignments because Canvas would not accept assignment submissions (Survey Participant #73), "…would always bring up error pages when I would submit" (Survey Participant #60), would not upload video submissions as the assignment called for (Survey Participant #79), or did not allow the student to upload "…a big document…put together for an assignment" (Survey Participant

Table 5.2: Student-Reported Conflicts and Frequencies

Category of Conflict	Frequency/ Percentage
Technical Issues	17; 19.77%
Unclear Assignment Expectations	15; 17.44%
Untimely Response to Email/Messages	14; 16.28%
Grade Issues	12; 13.95%
Conflicting Due Dates	9; 10.47%
Request for Accommodation	6; 6.98%
Unclear or Difficult Exams/Quizzes	5; 5.81%
Untimely Grading	3; 3.49%
Proctored Exams	2; 2.33%
Types of Assignments	2; 2.33%
Insufficient Office Hours	1; 1.16%

#80).

In three conflict instances related to submissions via Canvas, students reported technology issues were due to instructor error. For example, Survey Participant #67 shared a conflict experience because they “could not submit the assignment (a week earlier than due) via Word Document as requested by the instructor. I was told that I would have to "figure this out" on the next assignment.” In a similar fashion, Survey Participant #33 recollected “a conflict that I experienced was that the professor had an assignment that was marked as due, yet the submit option was not available.” Survey Participant #39 expressed

> …a conflict recently with an instructor over the instructions for an assignment (selecting a group - super easy assignment I just hadn't ever done it before and didn't know how to) - as the student I couldn't see the instruction details when I clicked on that specific assignment in Canvas it only showed the rubric which wasn't enough instruction to complete the assignment.

Survey Participant #39 went on to explain the instructor placed the assignment instructions in the incorrect weekly module on Canvas.

Two students cited conflicts that precipitated when Canvas uploaded their completed assignment as a blank document. Survey Participant #99 explained, "I turned in an assignment on time but for some reason the assignment I turned in was only a blank document, there was some type of issue with the assignment." Likewise, Survey Participant #137 said

> I had a conflict with a professor earlier this semester about an assignment. I thought I had turned in the assignment correctly and on time but I hadn't received a grade for the work, 3 weeks later. I had to download my past assignments to complete an assignment i was working on, while I was in the process of that I noticed that my assignment that I hadn't received a grade yet was a blank document when I downloaded it.

The second theme in this category concerned conflicts that stemmed from three student experiences with not having access to certain assignments or parts of their online course (Survey Participant #97). Survey Participant #3 recalled a conflict that emerged when " We were supposed to do a google hangout. It didn't work…" and Survey Participant #6 explained

> On one of the tests I had to take for the class, several images/graphs weren't loading and I couldn't see them. This was a technical problem that wasn't my fault, and many other students experienced the same problem, but not all of them.

Three experiences of conflict concerned Microsoft software issues, which

often led to technical issues. One student recalled experiencing conflict when they were "…unable to view the entire quiz" because they were "using (windows explorer)" (Survey Participant #112). Other conflicts transpired when the grading program in Canvas "had a hard time recognizing that I had solved a particular problem in excel" (Survey Participant #7), students were expected to know how to use "weebly or excel features" (Survey Participant #70), or needed to complete assignments in "publisher (a windows program)" even though the student was working from a Mac platform (Survey Participant #68). Whereas most technical issues were due to submission issues, instructor error, or platform problems, 1 student's comment was literal in its meaning when they experienced technical issues after their computer "died" and "…the time period to take an exam where when I had wanted to take the exam" passed (Survey Participant #2).

Even though this conflict category did not completely align with an instructor misbehavior, there was some overlap with the *Lack of Technical Expertise* category. Specifically, it appears that students perceive instructor error as a contributing factor to conflict because when instructors post links that are broken or pages that are not activated, it prevents them from being able to access and complete their work.

Unclear Assignment Expectations

From student experiences, a contributing factor to conflict emerged concerning unclear assignment expectations (n = 15). The majority of student comments in this category did not provide details about what was unclear in an assignment prompt. In general, students reported that assignment instructions

did not include enough detail (Survey Participant #82) and in some instances, did not include instructions at all (Survey Participant #145). For example, assignment instructions were not up to date (Survey Participant #41) or were "over explained," which made "most assignments seem more complicated than they actually were" (Survey Participant # 66). Comments such as "I did not understand an assignment" (Survey Participant #63) and "There was something that I did not understand in regards with the homework" (Survey Participant #95) lacked specifics about what students did not understand about assignment instructions.

Though some student comments focused on the lack of clarity in assignment instructions, other students turned their attention to an instructor's imprecise expectations for assignments or exams (Survey Participant #41 & Survey Participant #89). Survey Participant #92 expressed conflict "…with an instructor with an online course [who had] assignment descriptions that were very broad." In a like manner, Survey Participant #4 shared an experience where they were "asked to write a 15 page paper and the instructions on how to write the paper were very ambiguous." Other comments in this category expressed they experienced conflict when they were not "properly informed of expectations" (Survey Participant #18) or unsure "what the professor really wanted in the assignment" (Survey Participant #117).

Although the accounts of conflict in this category lacked descriptions of specific attributes of unclear expectations, this category directly aligns with the previously described instructor misbehavior, *Unclear Expectations*. In other

words, when instructors do not provide instructions for course assignments that the students experience as straightforward and clear, not only do students perceive this as a misbehavior, but they also identify it as a contributing factor to conflict.

Untimely Response to Email/Messages

In commenting about their experiences in online courses, students identified an instructor's untimely response or lack of response to their email or messages as a contributing factor to conflict (*n* = 14). Eight students experienced conflicts in which an instructor's untimely response was identified as a precipitating factor. For example, students reported "Sometimes I don't get an answer back in a timely manner" (Survey Participant #47), "…I have had a professor who did not answer my email for days after I sent it" (Survey Participant #56), "E-mailed instructor to where [they] said was most reachable…eventually received reply" (Survey Participant #140), and "my current teacher is terrible at communicating with me and it hasn't been resolved because she hasn't responded to any of my emails in a timely manner" (Survey Participant #128). The greater part of the responses suggested email or Canvas message as the primary communication platforms; however, one student recalled conflict after leaving a voicemail for an instructor and receiving an untimely response:

> I vaguely remember having an issue with an assignment, either submitting it or having a question about it, and attempting to contact the instructor prior (via the cell number provided in the syllabus) and being unsuccessful for days. I left several voicemails and extended ways to get back in touch with me but never heard back until the assignment due date had passed. (Survey Participant #122)

Even though untimely responses were a contributing factor to conflict, the majority of the students did not articulate their understanding of the term 'untimely,' commenting with verbiage such as "they take forever to respond" (Survey Participant #72). Only 3 student's responses suggested an indication about time expectations. For example, Survey Participant #136 stated, "I…always have some questions about the assignment, and I tried to email the instructor, but he normally replied me about two days later" and Survey Participant #22 noted

> Most conflicts I have had were about not answering my questions in a timely manner…if there is only one way of contacting the professor, and they do not respond to you for a couple of weeks, it makes taking [the] course very stressful.

Similarly, Survey Participant #25 explained, "The conflict I have had was about an assignment that I had multiple questions on, so I emailed the instructor. I was able to get those questions answered, but they weren't answered until multiple days later."

In the other six comments in this category, students discerned an instructor's nonresponsiveness to emails and questions as a contributing factor to conflict (Survey Participant #88 & Survey Participant #132). Students recalled experiences in which the instructor "…never responded to a question on an assignment announcement" (Survey Participant #75), did not reply back to an email with "a concerning question" (Survey Participant #28), "never responded to my question on a assignment" (Survey Participant #81), and "Could not get a professor to respond" (Survey Participant #100).

This conflict category shows substantial alignment with the instructor

misbehavior, *Unsatisfactory Responses*. Specifically, the similarities are in regard to online instructors who take too long to respond and/or are unresponsive altogether.

Grade Issues

Students identified grade issues as a contributing factor to conflict with instructors in online courses (*n* = 12). Of the comments, three concerned instructors who input incorrect grades on the LMS/Canvas. Students explained, "A conflict I have had with an instructor is that she didn't put in the correct grade I had received" (Survey Participant #77), "…a grading error which I messaged him about" (Survey Participant #96), and "being graded wrong, and I politely pointed out the professors mistake" (Survey Participant #135).

Two student comments addressed how auto-grading negatively impacts grading in online courses. Survey Participant # 111 recalled an instructor who

> …was using an online grader that only grades grammar and not intellectual thoughts and explanations. I think this often has to do with instructors treating online classes like students sometimes, in that they slack off a little bit. I realize that instructors work loads are rigorous, and often they can't find the time just like students, but papers need to be read by a human being, not a robot.

Similarly, Survey Participant #31 experienced a conflict due to an auto-grader that "was only set to receive a specific answer that didn't account for rounding, the answer I entered was considered wrong. I had to make an appointment to meet during office hours so I could show my work."

Inconsistent grading also appeared as a theme in this category. Survey Participant #69 commented that a contributing factor to their conflict was due to

“getting different scores on papers that I felt I consistently were good.” In a related comment, Survey Participant #12 recalled a group assignment where each group member submitted the “same information for the assignment. Yet when we got the assignments back there was a full letter grade between mine and their assignments.”

In some instances, students noted that even after fulfilling the requirements of a rubric, their grade did not reflect their completion of the requirements. Survey Participant #26 commented, “I have had grades that I don't understand. Even though there is a rubric, I still don't think the grade was fair and it deserves a face to face conversation.” Survey Participant #141 noted a conflict that emerged because they “received a poor grade on an assignment of which I believe to have completed exactly as the rubric stated.” In one case, a student was “…asked to peer review another student's assignment. I completed the peer review rubric as well as left the required comments” (Survey Participant #65). Finally, a student recalled that their grade was based on the instructor’s subjectivity especially “regarding my preference of art. I didn't try to overcome the issue because she did posted all the grading possibilities on the rubric” (Survey Participant #121).

The other student comment in this category did not fit into a theme per se, but nonetheless identified grading as a contributing factor to their experience with conflict in an online course. In recollecting a group assignment experience, Survey Participant #42 took issue with having to “give credit to group members that did not participate in the group project.”

Although not stated explicitly in the student accounts of conflict, there appears to be an implication that grade issues stem from *Inadequate Feedback*, which was previously identified as an instructor misbehavior. In particular, student experiences with conflict in online courses suggests that when instructors do not provide sufficient feedback, students may not fully understand their grade and thus, an ensuing conflict is conceivable.

Conflicting Due Dates

Students identified conflicting or unclear due dates as a factor that may give rise to conflict in online courses (*n* = 9). The majority of the student comments concerned conflicting due dates, which were differing depending on where students looked for information (e.g., course calendar, email, etc.). Survey Participant #44 explained that instructors "…tell you a date, but the calendar doesn't reflect that and people go off what they see on canvas." In another account, Survey Participant #129 similarly described a conflict that arose because "a module for the week said one thing was due, whereas the assignment page said something else was due at the end of that week." In other instances, students detailed an instructor whose reminder emails included due dates for assignments that were different than what was posted on Canvas (Survey Participant #91) and due dates for "assignments did not follow the lesson plan or the calender, or the emails. This became very confusing and frustrating" (Survey Participant #61).

In addition to conflicting due dates, students also noted a contributing factor to conflict was confusing or unspecified deadlines. Survey Participant #38

explained, “I did not realize the due date of a test, because the explanation was confusing on Canvas.” Another student reported feeling perplexed when they noticed their “…instructor closed a discussion before the due date” (Survey Participant #45), which left the student confused about what the correct due date was. Survey Participant #74 was puzzled by the order of due dates and recalled an experience where

> There was one extra credit that did not open until the assignment was completed but the extra credit needed to be done before the assignment was due, so I was not able to complete the extra credit. I would imaging that most people do not do the assignment before it is due so that would be quite hard.

In an online course where the weeks ran Sunday to Sunday, Survey Participant #142 was not “aware that the due date was supposed to be on a Friday and not on a Sunday.” Finally, Survey Participant #49 noted a conflict experience when “…a certain due date wasn't specified so I didn't know when to turn in a very important assignment.”

This category of conflict directly aligns with the student-identified instructor misbehavior, *Inconsistent or Conflicting Due Dates*. Student accounts indicate conflict emerges from conflicting due dates because it may cause students to complete or submit the assignment at the incorrect time and leave students feeling frustrated.

Request for Accommodation

Students commented that a contributing factor to conflict was their request for accommodation (n = 6). Three student responses focused on the excuse they provided to their instructor. For example, Survey Participant #19 stated:

> I was late completing the first assignment of the online course this semester (it was the first week and I was still figuring out my routine) so I emailed the professor asking for leeway and help…it took her a couple days to get back to me, and she didn't end up helping out as much as I was hoping.

Survey Participant #108 requested an extension because they "couldn't make a submission on time" and Survey Participant #50 explained that they emailed their professor to present their excuse because they "…went away for Spring Break, unaware of the homework we had scheduled for that week. I did not participate in it, however, it was a big week of homework and impacted my grade." Finally, Survey Participant #138 conceded that they knew what counted as a valid excuse, but went on to explain

> Once I missed an assignment deadline. The syllabus specifically stated that no late work would be accepted unless Doctor-excused. I didn't have an excuse with the professor but did have an "I just simply forgot" reason.

In other cases, students perceived a conflict because they requested an exception from the instructor with a valid excuse. For example, Survey Participant #61 explained an experience when they were

> …coming up on a week where I was going to be gone for a school sanctioned athletic event and wanted to try and get ahead for the week I was going to miss. I emailed the instructor…so I could get ahead.

Another student shared that their request for accommodation came after their "father passed away and I needed to take a couple weeks off of school" (Survey Participant #110).

As discussed at several points thus far, requests for accommodation are usually preceded by an excuse. However, in this category it becomes clear that

students may perceive conflict for various reasons. In some cases, students realize conflict may ensue when providing an invalid excuse, in which the request asks for an instructor to make exceptions to their course policies. In other cases, students may perceive conflict when asking for an extension, even when their excuse is both justifiable and valid (e.g., family death, university-sanctioned event).

Students provided accounts of requesting accommodations as the contributing factor that led to conflict with instructors. However, several of the students' responses implied that conflict stemmed from an instructor's unwillingness to fulfill their request because of their (invalid) excuses (e.g., I just simply forgot, instructor didn't end up helping as much as I was hoping). In these instances, there is a connection to the instructor misbehavior category, *Lack of Flexibility*, in which students may experience conflict because of an instructor's reluctance to extend deadlines for invalid reasons.

Unclear or Difficult Exams/Quizzes

Students reported unclear or difficult exams/quizzes as a contributing factor to experiencing conflict with their instructors (*n* = 5). Three student responses surrounded the topic of specific quiz questions that they disagreed with. For example, Survey Participant #62 recalled a conflict that transpired because of

> …ridiculous quizzes; most quizzes had a question or two that was not covered at all in the readings or homework, and many were worded poorly…I got a question wrong (and otherwise got 90% on most quizzes), and emailed the teacher to ask how this question was fair. It made no sense, there could have been more than 1

> answer, and the true "answer" seemed to make no more sense than the option I chose.

In the same way, Survey Participant #98 experienced conflict and recalled that they “disagreed with the way a quiz question was stated. It seemed to be confusing and misleading.” The final example of a student not agreeing with a quiz question said, “I disagreed with an answer I got wrong on a quiz. I emailed the teacher through canvas with a screen shot of the quiz questions and a picture of the book that I though backed up my answer” (Survey Participant #107).

The other two responses in this category concerned exams that were difficult or needed clarification. Survey Participant #143 commented that a conflict emerged because the “exam for one was to hard and no preparation of the exam was given.” Another student remarked, the “professor would give us the content for the test or quiz and then change the answers on the test and I couldn’t ask the professor right there what I should think in order to get the question correct” (Survey #11). This category does not align with any of the instructor misbehaviors that students identified.

Untimely Grading

Students identified untimely grading as a factor that played a part in conflict with an instructor (*n* = 3). Specifically, 1 student commented, “…it took a significant amount of time to get my assignments graded” (Survey Participant #57) while another explained their instructor “Did not grade any assignment until the end of the course” (Survey Participant # 133). Similarly, Survey Participant #21 offered

> In a current class I'm taking, the instructor didn't read any of our weekly responses for the first five weeks. The whole class was doing it wrong. We missed out on a quarter of the semester because of how incompetent the teacher was. I feel completely ripped off.

Students' accounts indicate that an instructor's untimely grading is a contributing factor to conflict in online courses. This category is directly connected to the instructor misbehavior, *Returns Work Late*. As previously explained, students find this problematic because it can prevent them from understanding the instructor's expectations and may also prevent them from applying and incorporating the instructor's feedback into future assignments.

Proctored Exams

Students commented that proctored exams were a contributing factor to conflict with instructors in online courses (*n* = 2). Survey Participant #54 explained that conflict arose because an instructor did not accept their test proctor. They went on and explained

> …he [the instructor] was being very specific on who he wanted to administer the test. I tried explaining things are different in other countries and that I no other professor had any issues with the proctor I had previously used, and that he was a Dr. in Physics who worked at a prestigiuos Research Facility and was the only English speaking person I could find to administer it.

In another instance, Survey Participant #315 recalled

> When it came to finals week, this professor insisted that we go to the university to take a written exam instead of doing an online one (?). This made no sense because we had taken all of the midterms online, why is this one any different?

Although this conflict category does not directly align with an instructor misbehavior category, it does reflect a specific part of the *Unreasonable Course*

Requirements category. Even though on-campus proctored exams are taken in the LMS/Canvas, when taking an online course, students expect that all of the course's components can be completed online. When this is not the case, students' experiences suggest that conflict may ensue.

Types of Assignments

Students made comments regarding conflict in which the contributing factor was an unreasonable assignment and/or assignment requirement (*n* = 2). Survey Participant #87 responded that they experienced conflict because of the "pointless assignments" in an online course. In a similar manner, Survey Participant #117 recalled a conflict with a professor

> …with a professor that required so many posts in an online discussion. I stated that the requirement took my attention away from what I could be learning and that if it were in a classroom setting I would probably not speak as much as I was required to online in that discussion.

Conflict surrounding the types of assignments required of students in online courses partly aligns with the instructor misbehavior category, *Busy Work and Unreasonable Assignment Requirements*. In the two conflict accounts above, students disliked pointless assignments and requirements they perceived as not useful to their online class experience. When such assignments are required in a class, conflict may emerge.

Insufficient Office Hours

A student reported that an instructor not holding enough office hours was a contributing factor to conflict (*n* = 1). Survey Participant #109 explained

> Currently I am dealing with a conflict with an instructor that is putting a huge work load on the class without offering resources or more than 2 office hours a week. It is difficult to have over 50 students needing help but not offering more than the two office (online or physical) hours a week.

This category did not directly map onto any instructor misbehaviors that were identified by students; however, it may suggest alignment with part of the category, *Unsatisfactory Responses*. In this example of conflict, the lack of office hours is associated with an instructor's unavailability and hence may arise as a conflict between the instructor and student.

Summary

To summarize, in this chapter, I presented the resulting categories of conflict from content analysis of instructors' and students' experiences with conflict. Two categories explored in this chapter were built on single responses (*Casual Email*, *Insufficient Office Hours*); while the categories with single respondent examples represent relevant experiences, they should be read differently than those with multiple respondents because they lack richness in the data that illustrates the category. It is of note that 8 of the 10 categories that emerged from instructor experiences with conflict aligned with student incivility categories. Similarly, 10 of the 11 conflict categories that materialized from student experiences with conflict mapped onto instructor misbehavior categories. Thus, these findings situate incivilities and misbehaviors as communicative actions that may precipitate conflict. The next chapter will explore the implications that these findings have in online learning environments.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overarching goal of this study was to explore the patterns of incivilities, misbehaviors, and conflict in online learning contexts. In Chapter Four, I described student incivility and instructor misbehavior categories that emerged from instructor and student responses. In Chapter Five, I worked toward an understanding of how incivility/misbehavior categories overlapped and coincided with conflict experienced by instructors and students in online classes. In this chapter, I explore and discuss the implications of the findings presented in the two preceding chapters and consider the limitations and future research opportunities spurred by this project.

Discussion

Research Question 1 asked: In an online course, what teacher/student misbehaviors are present? That is, RQ1 sought to identify the student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors experienced in online courses, which have been abundantly researched in the instructional context (Ballantine & Risacher, 1993; Boice, 1996; Burroughs, 1990; Kearney et al., 1991; Kearney et al, 2002; Plax & Kearney, 1999; Royce, 2000). Because the UOnline initiative calls for an increase in the amount of online courses and online programs available to

students, the findings of this study have relevance for the training of online instructors at the University of Utah. Furthermore, this research contributes to the existing body of literature by exploring how these behaviors manifest in online teaching/learning environments.

Student Incivilities

Student incivilities are defined as any "speech or action that is disrespectful or rude" (Tiberius & Flak, 1999). Using this definition as a framework, part of this research project sought to explore how student incivilities may differ in online teaching/learning settings. Whereas previous research identified 24 student incivilities (Ballantine & Risacher, 1993; Royce, 2000), nine student incivility categories emerged from this study, which specifically explored student behaviors in online learning contexts. Four of the categories from this study (*Acts of Dishonesty*, *Requests Accommodations*, *Writes Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts*, and *Unprofessional Communication*) demonstrated some overlap with the F2F student incivility categories (see Table 6.1).

With regard to the student incivilities *Cheating* and the novel category specific to online learning, *Acts of Dishonesty*, the common thread in each category is that both deal with two serious offenses of academic codes of conduct, cheating and plagiarism. *Acts of Dishonesty* highlights an element that is unique to the online learning environment in the form of student access to learning management systems. Through access reports, online instructors have the ability to view when, how, and if students have accessed the course content. However, this begs the question of how instructors utilize the report and

Table 6.1: Alignment Between F2F and Online Student Incivilities

F2F Student Incivility	Online Student Incivility
Cheating	Acts of Dishonesty
Demanding makeup exams, extensions, grade changes, or special favors	Requests Accommodations
Making harassing, hostile, or vulgar comments in class	Writes Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts
Sending the instructor inappropriate emails	Unprofessional Communication

communicate its purpose in online learning. My interviews with online instructors revealed some instructors chose to use the access report to "catch" students (i.e., detect lying) while others shared the purpose of how they used the access report with students and utilized it as a preemptive measure to deter students from dishonesty about their course access.

Demanding Makeup Exams, Extensions, Grade Changes, or Special Favors and *Requests Accommodations* share underlying commonalities about the ways in which course policies are communicated by an instructor and perceived and perhaps (mis)understood by students. The most notable difference between the online and F2F categories primarily lies in the language that describes the incivility. The F2F version of this incivility is framed by the term *demand* while the instructor's verbiage in this study includes *requests*, which suggests that students use a different (and perhaps more restrained) approach in how accommodation appeals are communicated in the different contexts. Additionally, instructors reported that requests for accommodations in

online courses are primarily communicated via email, whereas in F2F courses, other communication channels may be utilized (e.g., office hours, before/after class).

The categories *Making Harassing, Hostile, or Vulgar Comments in Class* and *Writes Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts* appear to be comparable, with the exception of harassing comments, which were not mentioned in instructors' responses about discussion board posts. A similar reality about student discussion comments in both contexts (F2F and online) is that contributions are each tied to a student's identity, be it virtual or real. However, unlike a F2F environment where student comments in a discussion are ephemeral, online student discussion posts are permanent (unless an instructor opts to delete it). This is a significant difference to note, as it potentially makes communication in an online class more detrimental to the learning environment because of its permanence on Discussion Boards, which can be accessed and/or viewed even after the discussion is closed for responses.

Sending the Instructor Inappropriate Emails and *Unprofessional Communication* share traits as incivilities. For example, each broaches the topic of disrespectful communication that is often accusatory and, at times, hostile in nature. Even so, the instructor responses about what makes unprofessional communication distinctive in online classes is the absence of F2F contact. That is, online instructors conveyed their perception that disrespectful communication transpired because online students did not have to interact with instructors in any other context but through mediated means.

More important than the overlap in four of the student incivility categories is the finding that the remaining five online student incivility categories (*Does Not Read Course Materials*, *Complaints*, *Offers Excuses*, *Lack of Communication*, and *Ineffective Communication*) did not align with F2F student incivility categories. This is paramount because it supports my initial conjecture that online student incivilities are in fact different from those identified in F2F classes. This also suggests courses held completely online differ in substantial ways from F2F courses.

Comments included in the category *Does Not Read Course Materials* noted excessive emails in which instructors were asked to reiterate the material posted on the LMS/Canvas. An implication of this student behavior is that it may dominate the time online instructors spend responding to emails (even though the time has already been spent posting the materials). Regarding the category *Complaints*, it is of note that instructors reported students' disposition toward online courses. Although instructors maintained they assigned an equivalent amount of work in online courses as their F2F versions of the same class, students pushed back against the course load in online courses. This notion was supported in students' comments about online courses where they viewed video lectures and voice-threaded presentations as "extra" work to do in addition to the normally required class readings and assignments. This may be remedied by explicit instructor communication about the time investment required to successfully complete the online course.

The category *Lack of Communication* indicates that instructors attempt to

establish interpersonal connections with students in their online courses; however, oftentimes these endeavors go unnoticed as students do not reciprocate nor respond to such communication. In fact, several instructors reported that students refuse their request for phone or F2F meetings even when it is evident that email is not the most suitable communication channel to resolve deep misunderstandings. Generally speaking, online instructors in this study maintained that when communication was lacking, it was mostly on the part of the students, not instructors. Similarly, the category *Ineffective Communication* suggests students may not understand that email communication for online class concerns necessitates elements such as context and specifics so that an instructor can properly address the student's concern. In both of these instructor-identified online student incivility categories, it is evident that the absence of F2F contact has a noteworthy effect on the communication that transpires in online learning contexts.

Instructor Misbehaviors

Extensive instructional communication research exists on instructor misbehaviors (Kearney et al., 1991; Kearney et al., 2002; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1996), which is described as the things instructors say and do that students do not like (Kearney et al., 2002). Though most research has examined such behaviors in F2F contexts, in a recent, study scholars measured teacher misbehaviors in an online course with a pre-existing scale (Kearney et al., 1991) and omitted the F2F items in order to account for differences between the contexts; this approach seems to disregard the nuances of online learning

environments. Thus, the approach utilized in this study sought to investigate whether a divergent set of instructor misbehaviors existed in the online learning environment.

Research (Kearney et al., 1991) previously identified 28 categories of instructor misbehaviors in F2F instructional settings; this study revealed 15 categories that emerged from student responses regarding experiences in online courses. Of the 15 categories of online instructor misbehaviors, four (*Unsatisfactory Responses*, *Unorganized Course*, *Returns Work Late*, and *Lack of Flexibility*) demonstrated overlap with F2F misbehaviors (see Table 6.2).

The category *Unsatisfactory Responses* shares commonalities with two F2F instructor misbehaviors: *Inaccessible to Students Outside of Class* and *Unresponsive to Students' Questions*. As online students pointed out, email is often the only way to communicate with their online instructor, even though instructors reported being available via email, Canvas messaging, Skype, and phone. Nonetheless, when an instructor is inaccessible, unresponsive, or does

Table 6.2: Alignment Between F2F and Online Instructor Misbehaviors

F2F Instructor Misbehavior	Online Instructor Misbehavior
Inaccessible to Students Outside of Class; Unresponsive to Students' Questions	Unsatisfactory Responses
Unprepared/Disorganized; Information Overload	Unorganized Course
Late Returning Work	Returns Work Late
Unreasonable and Arbitrary Rules	Lack of Flexibility

not provide a response in a timely manner, it is perceived as a misbehavior.

The online category of *Unorganized Course* and the F2F categories *Unprepared/Disorganized* and *Information Overload* appear to share some comparable traits. In both cases, students have preconceived expectations regarding what constitutes an organized instructor/course. In an online course, organization takes on a more literal meaning because the only immediate conveyance of the course information is via the LMS/Canvas (e.g., use of folders, menu tabs, modules). Additionally, overload in online courses deviates from F2F courses in that students in unorganized courses may experience information overload visually. In other words, instructors should streamline what students can see; Canvas pages crowded with too much text or too many links may be perceived as disorganized or cause overload.

The F2F and online instructor misbehaviors categories *Late Returning Work* and *Returns Work Late* are directly aligned. Online students identified this misbehavior as problematic because it prevents a student from making adjustments in the course based on instructor feedback. Furthermore, one of the benefits of Canvas is that it contains a Gradebook where instructors can upload and update student grades. However, when student grades are not updated regularly/in a timely manner, it is difficult for a student to know their standing in the course. Because students' only course access is through the LMS/Canvas platform, when instructors return student work it may be more noticeable.

Unreasonable and Arbitrary Rules and *Lack of Flexibility* share traits as instructor misbehavior categories in F2F and online courses. Students dislike

when instructors do not accept late work in both contexts. In a F2F class, it is generally accepted that instructors scaffold the course materials and assignments. Yet of note are the student comments that online instructors do not make all course content available to students at the beginning of the semester. In fact, when interviewing instructors about their approach to releasing course content, only 1 instructor commented that their class was self-paced (and all material was available for completion at any time; Interview Participant #20). What this category reveals is instructors may not be communicating their expectations of how students work through course content and knowledge in their online courses. Additionally, there are settings in Canvas that instructors may employ in order to set prerequisites before students can move through modules, but there was no mention of such settings in the student responses.

The salient finding of this study regarding online instructor misbehaviors is that 11 of the categories (*Frequency of Communication*, *Unclear Expectations*, *Teaching Methods, Inadequate Feedback*, *Busy Work and Unreasonable Assignment Requirements*, *Neglectful Conduct*, *Inconsistent or Conflicting Due Dates*, *Lack of Technical Expertise, Unreasonable Course Requirements*, *Messaging Platforms*, and *Unprofessional Communication*) are not identified in the list of F2F instructor misbehaviors. This finding is vital because it suggests that indeed, dissimilar instructor misbehaviors transpire in F2F and online courses. Several of the new categories named in this study demonstrate the ways in which online instructor misbehaviors are especially connected to the ways in which communication takes on meaning for students in online learning

environments.

Frequency of Communication suggests that students have varying ideas about the amount of communication they expect from their online instructors. Revealed in this study are student comments that specifically suggest lack of instructor communication negatively impacts their learning and leaves them feeling distracted. Relatedly, student comments in the *Inadequate Feedback* category indicate that an instructors' impersonal feedback led to feelings of disconnectedness. Finally, even though *Neglectful Conduct* was also a separate online instructor misbehavior category, it is moderately related to the other categories mentioned here insofar that an instructor's perceived impatience and unhelpfulness indirectly indicated an unwillingness to work with students. In other words, these categories illustrate an instructor's communication conveys more than a message, but also their level of immediacy and care for the student, which research has shown has an effect on learning (see Witt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004 for an extended review).

Related to care and the feeling of connectedness, time also appeared as a theme inherent in many of the categories unique to the online instructor misbehaviors. Online instructor misbehavior categories such as *Frequency of Communication*, *Unclear Expectations*, *Neglectful Conduct*, *Inconsistent and Conflicting Due Dates*, and *Inadequate Feedback* came at the perceived cost of students' time. Students reported setting aside time specifically for online courses based on the organization of the course; yet, when instructors did not communicate enough, were not clear about their expectations, posted

inconsistent due dates for assignments, or did not provide sufficient feedback, students were then responsible for initiating communication with an instructor to gain clarification. That is, in addition to implicitly demonstrating lack of instructor care, the additional communication appeared to be perceived as taxing to students' time in the absence of F2F communication from the learning context (where quick clarification communication occasions are more immediate).

Conflict and Incivilities/Misbehaviors

As mentioned in the literature review, classroom conflict research emphasizes locating variables that precipitate conflict. Two such elements that present a recurring pattern are student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors. As a reminder, Research Question 2 asked: What contributing factors that lead to conflict between instructors and students are experienced in online courses? Thus, RQ2 focused on discovering the contributing factors that lead to conflict between instructors and students in online courses.

In order to achieve understanding of this research question, students and instructors shared their experiences with conflict in online courses. This study is the first to explore student incivilities/instructor misbehaviors and conflict simultaneously and move toward an understanding of how interconnected instructor/student behaviors are with conflict in online teaching/learning contexts. The findings of this study showed considerable alignment between the categories of conflict and alignment with student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors (see Table 6.3 & Table 6.4). In fact, 8 of the 10 instructor-reported categories aligned with student incivility categories and similarly, 10 of the 11 student-

Table 6.3: Instructor-Reported Conflicts and Aligning Student Incivilities

Instructor-Reported Conflicts	Alignment with Student Incivilities
Invalid Excuses and Appeals for Accommodations	Offers Excuses; Requests Accommodations
Does Not Follow Instructions	Does Not Read Course Materials
Complaints About Grade or Assignment	Complaints
Academic Dishonesty	Acts of Dishonesty
Complaints About the Course	Complaints
Offensive Student Behaviors	Writing Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts
Issues with Technology	Offers Excuses
Confusion About Assignment	--
Accusations of Bullying	--
Casual Email	Unprofessional Communication

Table 6.4: Student-Reported Conflicts and Aligning Instructor Misbehaviors

Student-Reported Conflicts	Alignment with Instructor Misbehaviors
Technical Issues	Lack of Technical Expertise
Unclear Assignment Expectations	Unclear Expectations
Untimely Response to Email/Messages	Unsatisfactory Responses
Grade Issues	Inadequate Feedback
Conflicting Due Dates	Inconsistent or Conflicting Due Dates
Request for Accommodation	Lack of Flexibility
Unclear or Difficult Exam/Quizzes	--
Untimely Grading	Returns Work Late
Proctored Exams	Unreasonable Course Requirements
Types of Assignments	Busy Work and Unreasonable Assignment Requirements
Insufficient Office Hours	Unsatisfactory Responses

reported conflict categories mapped onto instructor misbehavior categories.

As an example to illustrate this important finding, Survey Participant #6 explained that conflict arose with students who did follow the instructions that were included in the weekly-recorded lectures. In a similar manner, when discussing student incivilities, Survey Participant # 17 commented about their annoyance with students who do not follow instructions "and consequently, do the assignment wrong." In other words, the incivilities/misbehaviors and conflicts that were identified by instructors and students shared numerous similarities in their descriptions and conceptually aligned.

Furthermore, when considering the conceptual patterns that emerged from both the incivility/misbehavior and conflict categories, I noticed that many concerned assignments and expectations. What this may suggest is that there are different concerns in online courses. This is not surprising given the asynchronous, text-based, and explicit nature of online courses. In other words, in an online course, assignments and expectations are focused on from primarily a verbal/written communication aspect whereas in a F2F class, both verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors of students/instructors are considered.

In sum, this was the first study to consider incivilities/misbehaviors and conflict simultaneously. Notably, the findings of this study suggest that conflict in online courses may be precipitated by the communicative behaviors and actions of either students and/or instructors. This conclusion is significant because it points to the importance of instructor/student communication because of the potential affects it has on influencing conflict in online instructional environments.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for researchers who study online learning environments and instructors who teach in online courses. Specifically, it supports establishing expectations, suggests considering conflict and communication in teaching/learning, and points toward ways in which instructional communication scholars may better describe and characterize the communicative behaviors that unfold in the online classroom.

Establishing Expectations

Communicating expectations is crucial in online courses and the findings of this study support the existing literature about instructors establishing expectations in online courses (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2005). The student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors identified and explicated in Chapter Four illustrate specific expectations to focus on in professional development and instructor training and those needing attention when composing and communication course policies.

As previously mentioned in the literature review, establishing and communicating course expectations should take place at several points during the term. In other words, sharing expectations should not be relegated only to the early discussions that take place in a course (usually in the introductory module). Communication about expectations should be reinforced throughout the semester and communicated in other places, such as assignment prompts. In online courses, much of the work communicating expectations takes place explicitly (i.e., text-based messages/posts). As exemplified by students'

responses in this study, when expectations are unclear, there may be an implicit perception of the instructor's lack of caring, affect, and immediacy.

When examining the online student incivility/instructor misbehavior categories, it is evident that instructor communication of expectations is entwined with many of the perceived problems. As an example, unprofessional communication and concerns about time were two points that were consistently addressed in student and instructor survey responses (both implicitly and explicitly). Time and impressions of professionalism were underlying factors in both the incivility and misbehavior categories. Using the findings of this study as a guide, it is evident that specific ideas are essential to establishing expectations for both online students and instructors. First, expectations of time need to be communicated. This includes articulating how often students should log in, an approximation of how much time will be spent online (per day, week, module etc.), how long it will take to provide feedback and establish what timely feedback is, average instructor response time, and hours the teacher will be online. Second, communication expectations require explication. That is, rules should be conveyed about the appropriate channels for communication based on situations (e.g., emergencies, questions), and what constitutes professional communication for both instructors and students (e.g., formality of language, netiquette, no acronyms or 'text speak,' greetings and salutations in emails, etc.). Often expectations are communicated in online courses explicitly (though introduction videos and course syllabi); online instructors may also implicitly reinforce their expectations by modeling, which serves as a point of

communicating what are both appropriate and unsuitable ways of communicating in the online (or mediated) learning environment.

Additionally, it is crucial to consider that expectations are not established by solely instructors; students come to courses with expectations as well. Thus, in a student-centered learning environment, instructors may work to co-construct expectations by ascertaining students' expectations as well. This can be easily achieved with an early semester survey that seeks to find out how often students want/need instructor communication and the most suitable methods of correspondence (e.g., email, Canvas messaging, Skype). In addition to gathering information about online student expectations at the beginning of the semester, periodic checks of whether expectations are being met may be facilitated by obtaining feedback from students throughout the semester. Put another way, both online instructors and students bear the responsibility of communicating their expectations in order to curb the incivilities/misbehaviors and ensuing conflicts identified in this study.

Because teaching is relationally driven, interpersonal skills are an important aspect of teaching and the relationship development between instructors and students (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). The aforementioned strategies to effectively establish and communicate expectations are an important contribution to understanding what skills instructors and students need to possess in online learning environments.

Considering Conflict and Communication

Nearly 25% (*n* = 33) of the total student sample in this study reported they have not experienced conflict in online courses. Initially, my impression of this statistic was positive. The majority of student comments were straightforward (e.g., "I have never been in a conflict with an online instructor," Survey Participant #5) and some went so far as to explain that the lack of conflict was a result of their professors, who were described as "willing to…help me succeed" (Survey Participant #14) and "understanding and helpful" (Survey Participant #24).

Upon further examination, I recognized that some student responses included language that should not be overlooked. For example, several comments included verbiage such as, "I have not had any major issues" (Survey Participant #40), "…have not had a conflict with an online instructor. I barely talk to them and never even meet them" (Survey Participant #48), "I have not had a conflict with an [instructor], I chose to just accept things and move on" (Survey Participant #27), "I assume that I am the only one feeling this way so I do not bring it up" (Survey Participant #13), "I haven't experienced a conflict per se. I have asked questions or had concerns that were not really addressed, honestly I just dropped them or figured them out myself" (Survey Participant #43), and:

> I have not had any conflict with instructors. I just let it go. I have had a few problems with questions in quizzes or assignments online that I felt were unclear or not defined, and instead of addressing it, I felt like my grade was high enough to just let a few negatives go, and focus on more important things. (Survey Participant #126)

The student responses analyzed in this study indicated that communication occurred (e.g., via email). However, the responses mentioned above were

excluded from my analysis because they did not meet an important criterion of Wilmot and Hocker's (1978) definition of conflict, that conflict occurs when a struggle is expressed. Nonetheless, these student responses reveal there may be a perceived 'price' of time and face to communicating conflict with instructors in online courses. The students' language choices are impactful and suggest there may be a level of discomfort in communicating conflict with instructors.

Expressions of Communicative Behaviors

As mentioned in the literature review, researchers tend to use the terms *incivility* and *misbehavior* interchangeably. This is likely in part due to how incivilities and misbehaviors are both: (a) defined as instances where what is said or done is found irritating or distracting, (b) described in terms of verbal and nonverbal communicative actions, and (c) viewed as barriers to learning. However, the terms *incivility* and *misbehavior* are teeming with connotations that may not be fitting of the communicative phenomenon they were designed to describe. In particular, I struggled with using two different terms when expressing seemingly similar actions taken by students and instructors.

Definitions and examples used to describe *incivility* connote belligerent and rude student communication. *Misbehavior* conjures ideas about K-12 education and actions taken by primarily elementary students. What became apparent through this research process is that many of the incivilities and misbehaviors were a result of unmet expectations. This led me to reflect on where our notions of expectations in the postsecondary learning environment come from. When considering the underlying expectations of the incivility and

misbehavior categories identified in this study, I noticed a pattern of reference to the formal rules or policies that exist. In fact, several of the online student incivilities and instructor misbehaviors identified in this study are linked to specific University of Utah Policies 6-316 and 6-400 (see Table 6.5).

In addition to the connotations mentioned above, the terms *incivility* and *misbehavior* seem antiquated and unrefined insofar that they attach judgment to a person's actions or being. If scholars seek a term that similarly captures the communicative actions of both students and instructors, I wonder if we may be better served by a term such as *misconduct*. As an example, terms such as *instructor misconduct* and *student misconduct* may be taken to describe the verbal and nonverbal instances that negatively deviate from established expectations and are found irritating and distracting to the learning environment. Our construct labels should reflect current research and provide consistency when describing similar occurrences that demonstrate noteworthy overlap. *Instructor misconduct* and *student misconduct* are terms that consider the findings of this research to move toward capturing a more nuanced understanding of behaviors that transpire in contemporary instructional environments.

Limitations

Although all research invariably has limitations, there are several limitations related to this study that deserve consideration. First, much of the classroom conflict literature is dedicated to exploring the management and prevention of conflict (Boice, 1996; Jamieson & Thomas, 1974; Meyers, 2003).

Table 6.5: Examples of Incivility/Misbehavior Alignment with University Policy

Category of Incivility/Misbehavior	Alignment with University Policy
Acts of Dishonesty	Policy 6-400, Section I, B2: "Academic misconduct" includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information, as defined further below. It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct."
Complaints	Policy 6-400, Section IV, B: "…discuss the academic action with the involved faculty member and attempt to resolve the disagreement. If the faculty member does not respond within ten (10) business days, if the student and faculty member are unable to resolve the disagreement, or if the faculty member fails to take the agreed upon action within ten (10) business days, the student may appeal the academic action in accordance with the following procedures."
Unprofessional Communication	Policy 6-316, Section 4, A1: "Faculty members must conduct themselves, in their interactions with other faculty members, administrators, staff members, students, and participants [as defined in Policy 5-107] in accordance with reasonable standards of professionalism."
Unclear Expectations **Returns Work Late**	Policy 6-400, Section II, B: "Rights in the Classroom. Students have a right to have their performance evaluated promptly, conscientiously, without prejudice or favoritism, and consistently with the criteria stated at the beginning of the course."

Note: *Italicized* font indicates a student incivility category. **Bolded** font indicates an instructor misbehavior category.

Despite students shared narratives regarding their experiences with conflict in online courses, my analysis excluded the portion of their responses that addressed the ways in which conflict was managed and/or resolved. Because I focused on the work of categorizing the experienced conflicts and moving toward an understanding of conflict that align with the incivilities/misbehaviors that are specific to online learning contexts, the reader of this dissertation may walk away with a feeling that all conflict is negative. Consequently, the exclusion of the data regarding conflict management and/or resolution means that this study does not address the positive experiences and outcomes of conflict.

Second, some aspects of my research design may have affected the data collected for this study. For example, a rich understanding was achieved regarding instructors' perceptions concerning student incivilities; however, because there were not student follow-up interviews, there were missed opportunities to gain clarification about recurring instructor misbehavior themes. This study lacked the contextualization of follow-up student interviews largely because I set out to conduct interviews in the first weeks of summer break when students may not be available to participate in such research activities. In addition to considering the timing of interviews, in the future, focus groups may be more conducive to scheduling with students. As a second example, the online surveys posed questions about student incivilities/instructor misbehaviors and then went on to ask about conflict. Thus, the manner in which the survey was set up may have unexpectedly created a pattern where the response

regarding conflict was affected by the previous questions about incivility/misbehavior.

The third limitation of this study concerns the participants that are included in my sample. In spite of the fact that measures were taken to achieve a representative sample, the demographics reveal that the majority of online student participants (58%) were from one major (Parks, Recreation, and Tourism). Furthermore, the College of Humanities was the most represented college in terms of online instructor participants (*n* = 18). Online students may have self-selected to participate because of the Amazon gift card incentive or other incentives (e.g., extra credit from an instructor) and online instructors may have taken part in the study because of their interest in online teaching and pedagogy. In future studies, my methodological choices may need to reflect a more rigorous manner of achieving representation of a more diverse sample.

Future Research

Despite the limitations of this study, future research in online student incivilities/instructor misbehaviors may benefit from exploring the effects of or on other salient variables in the online learning environment. One course of action would be to use the findings from this study to move toward validating an instrument to measure online instructor and student misconduct. Doing so would allow quantitative researchers to describe, generalize, and determine cause-effect relationships of how these constructs interact with different variables (e.g., affect, clarity, credibility). Instructional communication research would also benefit from qualitative work in which data collection include online course

observations (which can be achieved by being added as an “Observer” on LMS systems like Canvas), interviews, and focus groups so that thick, rich descriptions of communicative phenomena that occur in online instructional settings can be obtained. Finally, critical pedagogues may find interest in this line of research given that concepts such as gender, power, and culture most certainly influence the behaviors and experiences of online instructors and students.

Because the purpose of this study was primarily to name, categorize, and describe incivilities/misbehaviors and conflict, it purposefully lacked theory. Craig (2007) noted, “theory is designed to provide conceptual resources for reflecting on communication problems” (p. 70). Given my conception that the student-teacher relationship is interpersonal in nature, a variety of interpersonal communication theories may be useful for studying this relationship. In other words, the absence of theory from this study was not considered a limitation of this work. Nonetheless, expectancy violations theory (EVT) could potentially be used in future examinations of misconduct in order to understand how online instructor/student behaviors (i.e., unprofessional communication, requesting accommodations, etc.) affect students and instructors in online courses (i.e., does it violate their expectations positively or negatively?)

Summary

Online teaching/learning environments are increasing in prevalence in postsecondary education. Though some communicative aspects of online learning have been thoroughly investigated (i.e., instructor presence, social

community), student incivilities/instructor misbehaviors and conflict have not been explored in tandem. This study explicated the various patterns that emerged with regard to online incivilities/misbehaviors, considered what categories tend to precipitate conflict in online learning environments, and moved toward reframing our understanding of instructor/student behaviors by considering the use of the term *misconduct*. The findings from this study indicate the behaviors that transpire in online courses in fact do deviate from F2F behaviors; thus, there is support to suggest that the two instructional settings may need to be considered separately. Future research of instructor/student misconduct should be of particular interest, not only to instructional communication scholars and researchers, but also to educators who are interested in understanding the nuanced pedagogy in online teaching/learning.

APPENDIX A

COURSE CLASSIFICATIONS

Table A.1: Classifications Based on Types of Courses

Proportion of Content Delivered Online	Course Type	Typical Description
0%	Traditional	Course where no online technology used – content is delivered in writing or verbally.
1-29 %	Web Facilitated	Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. May use a course management system (CMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments.
30-79%	Blended/Hybrid	Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings.
80-100%	Online	Course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings.

Adapted from “Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States,” by I. E. Allen and J. Seaman, 2014, p. 6.

APPENDIX B

FACE-TO-FACE STUDENT INCIVILITIES LIST

1. Talking in class
2. Nosily packing up early
3. Arriving late and leaving early
4. Cheating
5. Wasting class time – a general category spanning being unprepared for class, dominating discussion, repeating questions, and asking for a review of the last class meeting
6. Showing general disrespect and poor manners toward the instructor and other students
7. Eating in class
8. Acting bored or apathetic
9. Making disapproving groans
10. Making sarcastic remarks or gestures
11. Sleeping in class
12. Not paying attention
13. Not answering a direct question
14. Using a computer in class for non-class purposes
15. Letting cell phones and pagers go off in class
16. Cutting class
17. Dominating discussion
18. Demanding makeup exams, extensions, grade changes, or special favors
19. Taunting or belittling other students
20. Challenging the instructor's knowledge or credibility in class
21. Making harassing, hostile, or vulgar comments to the instructor in class
22. Making harassing, hostile or vulgar comments or physical gestures to the instructor outside class
23. Sending the instructor inappropriate emails
24. Making threats of physical harm to the instructor.

Adapted from "Preventing and Responding to Classroom Incivility," by L. B. Nilson, 2010, *Teaching at Its Best*, pp. 71-82.

APPENDIX C

FACE-TO-FACE INSTRUCTOR MISBEHAVIORS LIST

Absent: Does not show up for class, cancels class without notification, and/or offers poor excuses for being absent.

Tardy: Is late for class or tardy.

Keeps Students Overtime: Keeps class overtime, talks too long or starts class early before all the students are there.

Early Dismissal: Lets class out early, rushes though the material to get done early.

Strays from Subject: Uses the class as a forum for her or his personal opinions, goes off on tangents, talks about family and personal life and/or generally wastes class time.

Confusing/Unclear Lectures: Unclear about what is expected, lectures are confusing and vague, contradicts him or herself, jumps from one subject to another and/or lectures are inconsistent with assigned readings.

Unprepared/Disorganized: Is not prepared for class, unorganized, forgets test dates, and/or makes assignments but does not collect them.

Deviates from Syllabus: Changes due dates for assignments, behind schedule, does not follow the syllabus, changes assignments, and/or assigns books but does not use them.

Late Returning Work: Late in returning papers, late in grading and turning back exams, and/or forgets to bring graded papers to class.

Sarcasm and Putdowns: Is sarcastic and rude, makes fun and humiliates students, picks on students, and/or insults and embarrasses students.

Verbally Abusive: Uses profanity, is angry and mean, yells and screams, interrupts and/or intimidates students.

Unreasonable and Arbitrary Rules: Refuses to accept late work, gives no breaks in 3-hour classes, punishes entire class for one student's misbehavior, and/or is rigid, inflexible, and authoritarian.

Sexual Harassment: Makes sexual remarks to students, flirts with them, makes sexual innuendos, and/or is chauvinistic.

Unresponsive to Students' Questions: Does not encourage students to ask questions, does not answer questions or recognize raised hands, and/or seems "put out" to have to explain or repeat him or herself.

Apathetic to Students: Does not seem to care about the course or show concern for students, does not know the students' names, rejects students' opinions, and/or does not allow for class discussion.

Inaccessible to Students Outside of Class: Does not show up for appointments or scheduled office hours, is hard to contact, will not meet with students outside of office time, and/or does not make time for students when they need help.

Unfair Testing: Asks trick questions on tests, exams do not relate to the lectures, tests are too difficult, questions are too ambiguous, and/or teacher does not review for exams.

Unfair Grading: Grades unfairly, changes grading policy during the semester, does not believe in giving As, makes mistakes when grading, and/or does not have a predetermined grading scale.

Boring Lectures: Is not an enthusiastic lecturer, speaks in monotone and rambles, is boring, too much repetition, and/or employs not variety in lectures.

Information Overload: Talks too fast and rushes through the material, talks over the students' heads, uses obscure terms and/or assigns excessive work.

Information Underload: The class is too easy, students feel they have not learned anything, and/or tests are too easy.

Negative Personality: Teacher is impatient, self-centered, complains, acts superior, and/or is moody.

Negative Physical Appearance: Teacher dresses sloppy, smells bad, clothes are out of style, and cares little about his or her overall appearances.

Does Not Know Subject Matter: Does not know the material, unable to answer questions, provides incorrect information, and/or is not current.

Shows Favoritism or Prejudice: Plays favorites with students or acts prejudiced against others, is narrow-minded or close-minded, and/or makes prejudicial remarks.

Foreign or Regional Accents: Teacher is hard to understand, enunciates poorly, and has a strong accent that makes it difficult to understand.

Inappropriate Volume: Does not speak loudly enough or speaks too loud.

Bad Grammar/Spelling: Uses bad grammar, writes illegibly, misspells words on the exam (or on the board), and/or generally uses poor English.

Adapted from "College Teacher Misbehaviors: What Students Don't Like About What Teachers Say and Do," by P. Kearney, T. G. Plax, E. R. Hays, and M. J. Ivey, 1991, *Communication Quarterly, 39*, pp. 314-315.

APPENDIX D

IRB-APPROVED RECRUITMENT EMAILS

Re: Teacher-Student Behaviors in Online Learning Environments, Kimberly Aguilar

Dear (Name of Instructor):

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about communication in online courses and how instructor/student behaviors affect the online learning environment, especially as they concern conflict. This study is being conducted by Kimberly Aguilar, a Ph.D. Candidate, at the University of Utah and will explore online instructors' experiences and conflicts that may have been experienced along with student behaviors that may have been encountered. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age have taught at least one online course at the University of Utah.

Should you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to respond to a 9-question online survey, which will take approximately 15 – 25 minutes to complete. If you are interested in participating in this survey, please follow this link: (link to be added here).

You are receiving this letter because you are listed as an online instructor on the University of Utah website. If you would like additional information about this study, please contact Kimberly Aguilar at k.aguilar@utah.edu or via phone at (951) 317-1146.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly N. Aguilar, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Principal Investigator
University of Utah
LNCO, 255 S. Central Campus Drive, Room 2400
Salt Lake City, UT 84112
k.aguilar@utah.edu

Re: Teacher-Student Behaviors in Online Learning Environments

Dear University of Utah Student:

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about communication in online courses and how instructor/student behaviors affect the online learning environment, especially as they concern conflict. This study is being conducted by Kimberly Aguilar, a Ph.D. Candidate, at the University of Utah and will explore online students' experiences and conflicts that may have been experienced along with instructor behaviors that may have been encountered. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age have taken an online course at the University of Utah.

Should you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to respond to a 9-question online survey, which will take approximately 15 – 25 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the online survey you will have the opportunity to enter a drawing to win one of five $15 Amazon gift cards; the chance of winning a gift card is dependent upon how many students participate in the survey.

If you are interested in participating in this survey, please follow this link: (link to be added here).

You are receiving this letter because you may have taken an online course at the University of Utah. If you would like additional information about this study, please contact Kimberly Aguilar at k.aguilar@utah.edu or via phone at: (951) 317-1146.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly N. Aguilar, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Principal Investigator
University of Utah
LNCO, 255 S. Central Campus Drive, Room 2400
Salt Lake City, UT 84112
k.aguilar@utah.edu

APPENDIX E

IRB-APPROVED CONSENT COVER LETTERS

Teacher-Student Behaviors in Online Learning Environments

Dear Instructor:

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about communication in online courses and how instructor/student behaviors affect the learning environment, especially as they concern conflict. I am conducting this study in order to examine your experiences as an online instructor, and inquire about conflicts that you may have experienced and student behaviors you have encountered.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to complete an online survey, which includes nine questions and will take about 15 – 25 minutes to complete. Read each statement carefully and respond by supplying the answer that best represents your attitude toward the statement. If you are unable to answer a question, leave the field empty. There is neither a right nor a wrong answer to any question. Participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time without fear of penalty. There are no risks associated with participation in this study and no perceived direct benefits. Clicking "yes" below indicates that you are least 18 years of age, have taught an online course during your academic career at the University of Utah, have read the description of this study, and agree to voluntarily participate in the study.

While I will ask you to provide your email address should you choose to participate in an optional follow-up interview, your involvement in this study will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in reports or publication. Data and records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer located in the researcher's workspace. Only the researcher and members of her study team will have access to this information.

If you have any questions, complaints, or if you feel you have been harmed by this research please contact Kimberly N. Aguilar, Department of Communication, University of Utah, (951) 317-1146. Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Kimberly N. Aguilar, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Principal Investigator
k.aguilar@utah.edu

Teacher-Student Behaviors in Online Learning Environments

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about communication in online courses and how instructor/student behaviors affect the learning environment, especially as they concern conflict. I am conducting this study in order to examine your experiences as an online student, and inquire about conflicts that you may have experienced and instructor behaviors you have encountered.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to please respond to a 9-question online survey, which will take approximately 15 – 25 minutes to complete.

Read each statement carefully and respond by supplying the answer that best represents your attitude toward the statement. If you are unable to answer a question, leave the field empty. There is neither a right nor a wrong answer to any question. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop at any time without fear of penalty. There are no risks associated with participation in this study and no direct benefits. Once you have completed the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter a drawing to win one of five $15 Amazon gift cards; the chance of winning a gift card is dependent upon how many students participate in the survey. Clicking "yes" below indicates that you are least 18 years of age, have taken an online course during your academic career at the University of Utah, have read the description of this study, and agree to voluntarily participate in the study.

I will ask you to provide your email address should you choose to participate in an optional follow-up interview and/or to enter the drawing for the Amazon gift card; however, your involvement in this study will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in reports or publication. Data and records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer located in the researcher's workspace. Only the researcher and members of her study team will have access to this information.

If you have any questions, complaints, or if you feel you have been harmed by this research please contact Kimberly N. Aguilar, Department of Communication, University of Utah, (951) 317-1146. Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

kaguilar.

Kimberly N. Aguilar, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Principal Investigator
k.aguilar@utah.edu

APPENDIX F

IRB-APPROVED SURVEYS

1. I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily participate in this study. (Appeared at the bottom of the first page of online survey with the IRB-approved letter of consent.)
   - ⊙ Yes
   - ⊙ No (if no, then participant was filtered out from participating)

2. I have taught at least one online course (in which 80% - 100% of the content is delivered online).
   - ⊙ Yes
   - ⊙ No (if no, then participant was filtered out from participating)

3. Indicate your instructor position:
   a. Graduate Teaching Assistant
   b. Adjunct Instructor
   c. Career Line Professor
   d. Professor (Assistant, Associate, etc.)

4. How many sections of online courses have you taught?
   a. 1 – 2 sections
   b. 3 – 4 sections
   c. 5 – 8 sections
   d. 9 – 12 sections
   e. 12 or more sections

5. In what category do you teach courses? (check all that apply)

College of Architecture and Planning	School of Business
College of Education	College of Engineering
College of Fine Arts	College of Health
Honors College	College of Humanities
College of Law	School of Medicine
College of Mines and Earth Sciences	College of Nursing
College of Pharmacy	College of Science
College of Social and Behavioral Science	College of Social Work

6. How would you classify yourself in terms of mastery of online teaching?
   a. Novice
   b. Intermediate
   c. Experienced

7. What do you view as the benefits of the online teaching/learning environment?

8. What is your concept of the term “conflict” in online instructional settings?

9. Think back on your experiences as an instructor in online courses. What

student communication behaviors (what students do and/or say) do you find annoying or do not like? Please provide as many specific, brief descriptions of these behaviors as possible.

10. Tell me about a conflict you've experienced in an online course with a student.
    a. What was the conflict about and how did you manage the conflict with the student?
    b. What was the outcome of the conflict?

11. Would you like to participate in a short interview regarding conflict in the online classroom (via phone or face-to-face)? If so, please provide your email address.

1. I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily participate in this study. (Appeared at the bottom of the first page of online survey with the IRB-approved letter of consent.)
    ⊙ Yes
    ⊙ No (if no, then participant was filtered out from participating)

2. I have taken at least one online course (in which 80% - 100% of the content was delivered online).
    ⊙ Yes
    ⊙ No (if no, then participant was filtered out from participating)

3. What is your major? (e.g., Communication, Physics, Psychology, Math)

4. How many credit hours have you completed toward your degree? (choose one)
    a. 1 – 30 units (Freshman)
    b. 31 – 60 units (Sophomore)
    c. 61 – 90 units (Junior)
    d. 91 – 120 units (Senior)
    e. Graduate Student

5. How many *online courses* have you completed?
    (open field)

*As a reminder, this project is focused on your experiences as an **online** student. The following questions will inquire about conflicts that you may have experienced and instructor behaviors you have encountered in online courses.*

6. What do you view as the benefits of an online course?
    (open field)
7. What does the term "conflict" mean to you in an online course?

(open field)

8. Think back on your experiences as a student in online courses. What instructor communication behaviors (what instructors do and/or say) do you find annoying or do not like? Please provide as many specific, brief descriptions of these behaviors as possible.
(open field)

9. Tell me about a conflict you've experienced in an online course with an instructor.
a. What was the conflict about and how did you manage the conflict with the instructor?
b. What was the outcome of the conflict?
(open field)

10. Would you like to participate in a short interview regarding conflict in the online classroom (via phone or face-to-face)? If so, please provide your name and email address.

11. If you would like to enter for an opportunity to win one of five $15 Amazon gift card prizes, please enter your email. Please note: your email address will be separated from your survey responses and will not be used to identify you for other purposes beyond contacting you if you win one of the gift cards. *Please **only** use your University of Utah email account (e.g., name@utah.edu).*

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

My name is Kimberly Aguilar and I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Communication here on campus. This study is concerned with communication in online courses and how instructor/student behaviors affect the learning environment, especially as they concern conflict. I want to thank you for being a part of my research and agreeing to participate in this follow-up interview. As I mentioned in my email, this interview will last about 15-25 minutes. As a reminder, your responses will be confidential and your name or student identities that you discuss with me will not be used in my research report or shared with anyone else.

1. Do you consent to participating in this audio-recorded follow-up interview? (participant must verbally consent "yes" before proceeding with the rest of the interview).

2. In detail, please describe what is your concept of the term "conflict" in online instructional settings?
    a. What do you think are the reasons for conflict or triggering events that leads to conflicts between students and instructors?

3. Think back on your experiences as an instructor in online courses. What student
    communication behaviors (what students do and/or say) do you find annoying or do not like? Please provide details about each of these behaviors.
    a. Can you tell me in more detail about… (participant response that may need clarifying details)?

4. Have you experienced conflict with a student in an online course?
    a. If yes, will you please explain what was the conflict about?
    b. How was the conflict communicated?
    c. How did you manage the conflict with the student?
    d. What was the outcome of the conflict? (e.g., Were there consequences to your relationship with that student? Please describe the subsequent communication with that student.)

5. Do you have anything else about this subject that you would like to share with me?

That's all the questions I have. Thank you for sharing your experiences about communication with students in online courses with me. I appreciate your time!

My name is Kimberly Aguilar and I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Communication here on campus. This study is concerned with communication in online courses and how instructor/student behaviors affect the learning environment, especially as they concern conflict. I want to thank you for being a part of my research and agreeing to participate in this follow-up interview. As I mentioned in my email, this interview will last about 15-25 minutes. As a reminder, your responses will be confidential and your name or instructor identities that you discuss with me will not be used in my research report or shared with anyone else.

1. Do you consent to participating in this audio-recorded follow-up interview? (participant must verbally consent "yes" before proceeding with the rest of the interview).

2. In detail, please describe what is your concept of the term "conflict" in online instructional settings?
    a. What do you think are the reasons for conflict or triggering events that leads to conflicts between students and instructors?

3. Think back on your experiences as an student in online courses. What instructor communication behaviors (what students do and/or say) do you find annoying or do not like? Please provide details about each of these behaviors.
    a. Can you tell me in more detail about… (participant response that may need clarifying details)?

4. Have you experienced conflict with an instructor in an online course?
    a. If yes, will you please explain what was the conflict about?
    b. How was the conflict communicated?
    c. How did you manage the conflict with the instructor?
    d. What was the outcome of the conflict? (e.g., Were there consequences to your relationship with that instructor? Please describe the subsequent communication with that instructor.)

5. Do you have anything else about this subject that you would like to share with me?

That's all the questions I have. Thank you for sharing your experiences about communication with instructors in online courses with me. I appreciate your time!

APPENDIX H

FIRST-LEVEL CODEBOOKS

Table H.1: RQ1 Codebook, First-Round Coding

RQ1: Student Incivility Categories	Frequency
Accountability	**1**
Assumptions About Self-Pacing	**1**
Complaints Parent	**13**
Complaints About Course	6
Complaints About Grades	7
Confused Students	**2**
Discussion Posts	**11**
Lack of Meaningful Responses	2
Offensive Discussion Posts	6
Posts That Criticize Classmates' Work	1
Responding To Discussions Without Reading	2
Do Not Follow Instructions	**21**
Asking Questions That Can Be Found Online	2
Don't Read Course Content	16
Email	**2**
Emails That Apologize Unnecessarily	1
Emails To Add Beyond Course Cap	1
Expectation for Instant Response	**2**
Extra Credit Requests	**1**
No Ability to Take Responsibility	**1**
Requesting Extensions or Accommodations	**8**
Student Communication Misbehaviors	**47**
Communication Cues	1
Emails without Identifying Information	1
Excessive Emails	5
Ignoring Instructor Emails	1
Inability to Ask Specific Questions	3
Inability to Self-Express	1

Table H.1: Continued

RQ1: Student Incivility Categories	Frequency
Lack of Communication	4
Lack of Respect	1
Lying About Course Access	1
Offering Excuses	8
Poor Grammar	3
Unprofessional Communication	16
Using Incorrect Communication Platform	2
Using Technology as an Excuse	**2**
Whining	**2**

Table H.2: RQ1 Codebook, First-Round Coding

RQ1: Instructor Misbehavior Categories	Frequency
Assignments	**12**
Busy Work	6
Time to Complete	3
Types of Assignments	2
Due Dates	**9**
Grading	**22**
Changes Grades	1
General Feedback	11
Inconsistent Grading	1
Not Grading in a Timely Manner	8
Tone in Feedback	1
Instructor Behaviors	**53**
Doesn't Help Me	1
Don't Do What They Say	3
Inconsistency	4
Lack of Care for Students	1
Lack of Patience When Working With Students	1
Material from Previous Semester	3
Not Willing to Work with Students	1
Unclear Expectations	31
Unorganized Course	8
Instructor Communication Behaviors	**75**
Casual Emails or Announcements	1
Communication Barriers	1
Does Not Respond to Questions	2
Insulting Students	1
Lack of Communication	18
Lack of F2F Communication	1
Lack of Participation in Discussions	1
Message Platforms	4
Miscommunication	1
Responds Incompletely to Messages	6
Takes Too Long to Respond to Message	15
Too Much Communication	13

Table H.2: Continued

RQ1: Instructor Misbehavior Categories	Frequency
Unreachable Instructor	11
Lack of Flexibility	**3**
Teaching Style	**27**
Group Work	2
Information Overload	5
Different in Various Classes	1
Learning Style	2
Not Engaging	1
Not Same as F2F	7
Providing Examples	1
Recorded Slideshows	2
Teaches Concepts the Hard Way	1
Videos	5
Tech Issues	**7**
Unreasonable Requirements	**7**

Table H.3: RQ2 Codebook, First-Round Coding

RQ2: Conflict Experienced with Students, Categories	Frequency
Academic Dishonesty	5
Accusation of Bullying	1
Casual Email	1
Incorrect Assignment Format	2
Issues with Technology	2
No Personal Responsibility	1
Offensive Behavior	4
Student Complaint About Class	3
Student Confusion	2
Student Excuse	9
Students Not Following Directions	3
Upset About Grade or Assignment	8
Wanting Exceptions to Rules	2
Untimely Responses to Questions	15

Table H.4: RQ2 Codebook, First-Round Coding

RQ2: Conflict Experienced with Instructors, Categories	Frequency
Did Not Communicate Expectations	1
Did Not Have Access to Course Materials	1
Exams	6
Grade Issues	14
Instructor Did Not Know Student	1
Instructor Not Available	1
Lack of Communication with Instructor	3
Questions or Concerns Not Addressed	1
Scheduling or Due Dates	16
Subjective Grading	1
Technical Issues	17
Unclear Assignments	23
Untimely Grading	4
Untimely Responses to Questions	15
Wanted to Turn in Late Assignments	1

APPENDIX I

SECOND-LEVEL CODEBOOKS

Table I.1: RQ1 Codebook, Second-Round Coding

RQ1: Student Incivility Categories	Frequency
Does Not Read Course Materials	**29**
General Lack of Reading	3
Assignments Completed Incorrectly	3
Uses Incorrect Platform for Communication	2
Demonstrated in Emails	21
Unprofessional Communication	**24**
Disrespectful Communication	11
Overly Informal Communication	6
Demanding Instant Communication	7
Complaints	**14**
Complaints About Course	6
Complaints About Grades	8
Writes Inappropriate Discussion Board Posts	**11**
Lack of Meaningful Responses	4
Offensive or Overly Critical Posts	7
Offers Excuses	**9**
Time Pattern for Incomplete or Late Assignments	2
Illness, Family Death, Technology	7
Requests Accommodations	**9**
Appeal for Extensions or Late Assignments	5
Special Favors	4
Lack of Communication	**6**
Last-Minute Communication	3
Ineffective Communication	**5**
Acts of Dishonesty	**2**

Table I.2: RQ1 Codebook, Second-Round Coding

RQ1: Instructor Misbehavior Categories	Frequency
Unsatisfactory Responses	**35**
Untimely Response	16
Unresponsive or Unavailable Instructor	13
Unhelpful Responses	6
Frequency of Communication	**29**
Lack of Communication	16
Over-Communication	13
Unclear Expectations	**28**
Instructions Unclear	23
Course Syllabi Unclear	2
Class Exams	2
Course Objectives	1
Teaching Methods	**12**
Videos and Video Lectures	5
Learning Style	3
Group Work and Recorded Slideshows	4
Inadequate Feedback	**11**
Lacking Feedback	7
General Feedback	4
Unorganized Course	**11**
Course Organization	8
Amount of Information Presented in LMS/Canvas	3
Busy Work and Unreasonable Assignment Requirements	**10**
Type of Task	6
Unreasonable Requirements	4
Neglectful Conduct	**10**
Inconsistent	3
Lacks Follow Through	3
Unhelpful, Impatient, Lack of Care	4
Inconsistent or Conflicting Due Dates	**10**

Table I.2: Continued

RQ1: Instructor Misbehavior Categories	Frequency
Lack of Technical Expertise	**6**
Unreasonable Course Requirements	**6**
Exams	2
Requirements to Be Online	3
Does Not Consider Student Means	1
Messaging Platforms	**3**
Lack of Flexibility	**3**
Unprofessional Communication	**2**

Table I.3: RQ2 Codebook, Second-Round Coding

RQ2: Instructor Conflict Experienced with Students, Categories	Frequency
Invalid Excuses and Appeals for Accommodations	**8**
Dropped by Registrar	2
Vacation	2
Does Not Follow Instructions	**6**
Incorrect Format	2
Unprofessional Postings	2
Ignored Instructions on LMS/Canvas	2
Complaints About Grade or Assignment	**6**
Grades	3
Unfair Grade	3
Academic Dishonesty	**4**
Plagiarism	2
Colluding with Other Students	1
LMS/Canvas Workaround	1
Complaints About the Course	**4**
Workload	2
Organization	1
Content	1
Offensive Student Behaviors	**3**
Issues with Technology	**2**
Confusion About Assignments	**2**
Accusations of Bullying	**1**
Casual Email	**1**

Table I.4: RQ2 Codebook, Second-Round Coding

RQ2: Student Conflict Experienced with Instructors, Categories	Frequency
Technical Issues	**17**
Assignment Submission Issues	11
Lack of Access	5
Unclear Assignment Expectations	**15**
Clarity	9
Expectations	6
Untimely Response to Email/Messages	**14**
Untimely Response	8
Non-Responsive	6
Grade Issues	**12**
Incorrect Input on LMS/Canvas	3
Auto-Grading	2
Inconsistent Grading	2
Subjective/Deviated from Rubric	4
Conflicting Due Dates	**9**
Invalid Excuses	7
Valid Excuses	2
Request for Accommodation	**6**
Unclear or Difficult Exams/Quizzes	**5**
Disagreed with Specific Questions	3
Difficult or Needed Clarification	2
Untimely Grading	**3**
Proctored Exams	**2**
Type of Assignments	**2**
Insufficient Office Hours	**1**

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